

Collaborative

CULTURES

TOOLS

- 7.1 Culture is...
- 7.2 School culture survey
- 7.3 An audit of the culture starts with two handy tools
- 7.4 Positive or negative
- 7.5 Change agent
- 7.6 'Collaboration lite' puts student achievement on a starvation diet
- 7.7 Community means more than teamwork
- 7.8 Trust is the on-ramp to building collaboration and collegiality
- 7.9 Culture shift doesn't occur overnight — or without conflict
- 7.10 Student learning grows in professional cultures
- 7.11 Pull out negativity by its roots
- 7.12 A new role: Cultural architect
- 7.13 The on-ramp to building learning communities
- 7.14 Build the infrastructure first

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Time for teachers to talk about teaching is a major component of our school/district professional development.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE NO OPINION DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

Attaining our students' learning goals depends on staff's ability to work together well as colleagues.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE NO OPINION DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

A high level of trust exists between teachers and administrators in our school and district.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE NO OPINION DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

A primary outcome of our professional development is to cultivate in-house expertise in instruction, curriculum, and assessment.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE NO OPINION DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

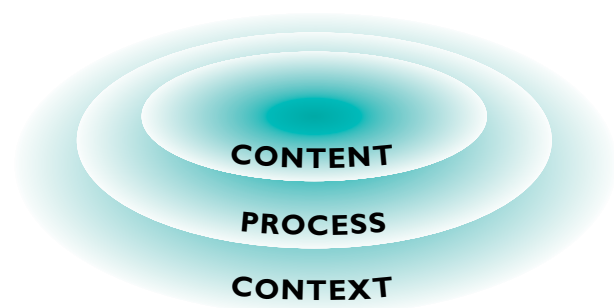
Educators challenge each other to accept no excuses for low student achievement.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE NO OPINION DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

For more than two decades, research has shown that teachers who experience frequent, rich learning opportunities have in turn been helped to teach in more ambitious and effective ways. Yet few teachers gain access to such intensive professional learning opportunities. More typically, teachers experience professional development as episodic, superficial, and disconnected from their own teaching interests or recurring problems of practice. This prevailing pattern — a few rich opportunities, many disappointing ones — speaks both to the promise and to the limitations of professional development as it typically is organized. An important part of this enduring story centers on the schools and districts where teachers work and whether they are positioned well to foster professional learning opportunities that enhance the quality of teaching and learning. (Little, 2006, p. 1)

The first chapter of this tool kit presents Arkansas' and NSDC's standards for staff development. The 12 standards are grouped into three major categories: context, process, and content. Most people understand the need for both content and process standards. Some wonder about the

relationship between professional development and context. The context standards signal that organizational culture, support, leadership, and resources are essential in developing effective, job-embedded professional development within a school or district. In other words, a strong collaborative culture that values continuous improvement, honors the expertise of teachers and administrators, expects ongoing learning about teaching, and invites faculty innovation is also necessary — along with the use of new professional development strategies. School and district cultures can either push people toward collaboration or pull them away from working together. "Schools' organizational conditions function either as a *centripetal* force pulling teachers



to pursue common purpose or as a *centrifugal* force pushing teachers to pursue individual purpose" (Rosenholtz, 1991, p. 63).

Marzano's meta-analysis of school factors that lead to high levels of student achievement and learning describes the need for professionalism and collegiality. School cultures characterized by collegiality and professionalism promote teachers' conversation about their work. Next to a highly effective teacher, the second most powerful factor in increased student achievement is an effective school culture that encourages, supports, and expects teachers to work together to improve their own practice, as well as student learning. Marzano (2003) notes that this kind of school culture is still rare.

An example may help distinguish between a collegial culture and a congenial one. Thousands of teachers from 134 randomly selected schools were asked to describe their school culture. The results were sorted according to whether schools were considered high- or low-performing. The results indicate (Jerald, 2006):

High-performing schools valued:

- Hunger for improvement;
- Raising capability — helping people learn;
- Focusing on the value-added;
- Promoting excellence — pushing the boundaries of achievement
- Making sacrifices to put pupils first.

Low-performing schools valued:

- Warmth, humor, repartee, feet-on-the-ground
- Recognizing personal circumstances — making allowances — tolerance — it's the effort that counts;
- Creating a pleasant and congenial working environment.

SCHOOL CULTURE

The importance of a school's culture was recognized as early as the 1930s (Jerald, 2006). But the link between school culture and educational outcomes was not forged until the 1970s.

What is school culture? It's more than climate or morale. School culture has been "defined as 'the underground flow of feelings and folkways wending its way within schools' in the form of vision and values, beliefs and assumptions, rituals and ceremonies, history and stories, and physical symbols" (Jerald, 2006, p. 2). It involves common practices, expectations, and norms of practice.

Stoll's indicators of school culture include (cited in Killion, 2006, p. 64):

Aspects of school culture	Visible evidence
Celebrations	How staff and student successes and achievements are recognized and celebrated.
Stories	How the school talks about itself — its history and myths; whose stories are told and whose are overlooked; stories told by the community and the school about the school.
Shared sayings	The language the school uses to talk about itself, e.g. "We're a community school."
Taboos	What is not allowed within the school, explicitly and implicitly, from types of behavior to how certain groups or people are treated.
Ways of rewarding	Intrinsic or extrinsic rewards to staff and students; acknowledgements.
Rituals	How common events are run and what is emphasized at them, for example athletic achievement, discipline, academic achievement, community contributions.
Communications	How messages, positive and negative, are delivered to the school or wider community; the channels, levels of, and path for communication within the school.
Behaviors	How students and staff treat each other; the level of respect, trust, collaboration, and sharing evidence, how guests are treated.
Rites of exit and entry	How new staff members are inducted; how farewells for staff and students are conducted; how new students and new parents are welcomed.
Events	The focus of significant annual events like awards, school plays, field day, homecoming, prom, etc.

These cultural patterns are powerful. They shape and mold the way people think, act, feel, and, more importantly, they impact individual performance of those who work within the culture. Studies of school culture have found that positive school culture was a “prime contributor” to students’ academic success, could determine whether improvement efforts withered or succeeded, and cultivated school effectiveness and productivity (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

The first step in developing a school culture that supports continuous, job-embedded professional development is to assess the current culture. **Tool 7.1, Culture is...**, describes a conversation about the elements of culture that helps explain how staff members view the organization’s culture. **Tool 7.2, School culture survey**, is an alternative means for assessing school culture based on the 12 norms of a healthy school identified by Saphier and King (1985). **Tool 7.3, An audit of the culture starts with two handy tools**, is a more extensive approach to assessing current culture.

ELEMENTS OF A COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

A collaborative culture needs to be distinguished from a congenial environment. Most schools provide comfort and caring to their members. School staffs seem to have incredible capacity to attend to *personal* events or challenges: the birth of a baby, a wedding, or the need for sick days because of catastrophic illness. Yet the capacity of a school to focus on learning, high-quality teaching, student success, and overcoming barriers is what distinguishes a good school from a great one.

Early work, conducted by listening to conversations in the teachers’ lounge, identified four norms that supported changes in classroom instruction (Little, 1981, p. 9-10):

- **“Teachers engage in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise *talk* about teaching *practice*.”** These conversations result in a shared language among teachers. A shared language enables teachers to go beyond the surface and explore the complexities of high-quality instruction. “The concreteness, precision, and coherence of the shared language” leads to high-quality experimentation with new instructional practices and more rigorous collegial interaction.
- **“Teachers and administrators frequently *observe* each other teaching and provide each other with useful ... evaluations of their teaching.”** There is, for most people, a gap between knowing and doing. The best feedback is based on actual observation of classroom practice that focuses on common terminology and critical attributes of practice. This is where the rubber meets the road. While this kind of collegial interaction can be a little close to the bone, it remains a powerful strategy for building collaboration skills.
- **“Teachers and administrators *plan, design, research, evaluate, and prepare teaching materials together*.”** Before new practices or materials are used in the classroom, most teachers need time to prepare. When teachers and administrators prepare together, their collaboration reinforces the idea that joint work takes less time, builds a common understanding of the new approach, and supports each person in being able to attain high-quality use of new practices.
- **“Teachers and administrators teach each other the practice of teaching.”** This norm goes beyond creating formal mentor or lead teacher positions. It allows opportunities for each teacher

to share with other teachers those practices that have been successful in helping student learning. Teaching each other is the essence of job-embedded professional development; the practice occurs in the context of small learning teams working on developing new practices, while reviewing student work, and in solving problems.

More research into this area continues to elaborate on the definition of a collaborative, professional culture. Other elements of a positive professional culture include:

1. Clear, shared purpose for all students' learning that is supported by teachers' collaboration (Lieberman, 1999);
2. Professional learning characterized by collective participation, active learning, coherence, and sustained duration (Little, 2006);
3. Reinforcement and alignment of every activity with the vision of high levels of learning for all students through use of rituals, hero making, storytelling, symbolic display, and rules (Jerald, 2006);
4. Development of collaborative teacher teams that work interdependently to achieve common goals focused on student learning (DuFour, DuFour, Lopez, & Muhammad, 2006);
5. Promotion of shared and distributed leadership; school members involved in making school decisions (Hord, 2007).

Tool 7.4, Positive or negative, examines the characteristics of positive and negative school culture, describing methods for assessing current culture. **Tool 7.5, Change agent**, describes the importance of a positive school culture for student achievement. **Tool 7.6, Collaboration lite**, defines the elements of high-powered, high-quality professional collaboration. **Tool 7.7, Community means more than teamwork**, details the essential characteristics of a school that learns together to attain high levels of learning for all students.

TRUST

The existence of trust among members of a school community can make or break efforts at reforming classroom practices, implementing curriculum, or improving student performance (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). This finding suggests that the level of trust, respect, and collegial interaction among school staff may be more critical than the structural changes that are typically the focus of reform efforts.

One reason trust is so crucial is that many change efforts inherently involve risk. “When school professionals trust one another and sense support from parents, they feel safe to experiment with new practices” (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p.43). The principal plays a critical role in developing and sustaining trust within the building. **Tool 7.8, Trust is the on-ramp to building collaboration and collegiality**, addresses this issue and describes additional strategies for the principal.

SHAPING CULTURE

Which came first — teacher collaboration that forges a collegial culture or a positive, professional culture that inspires, promotes, and sustains teachers' collaborative interactions and learning? This chicken-or-egg question has no definitive answer. But clearly initial steps toward collaboration can quickly be subdued by a school culture that does not value collegiality. Cultural forces are powerful and subtly determine what is done — or not done — within the environment.

The first step in shaping the culture is to read and assess the current culture. The next step is to transform the culture by “reinforcing positive aspects and working to transform negative aspects” (Peterson, 2002, p. 14). That is why reading and assessing the culture is the first step; school leaders — both administrators and teachers — must know what behaviors and values to reinforce and which to transform. In their work on school culture, Deal

and Peterson suggest the following strategies for overcoming a negative culture:

1. Confront the negativity head on; give people a chance to vent in a public forum.
2. Shield and support positive cultural elements and staff.
3. Focus energy on recruiting, selecting, and retaining effective, positive staff.
4. Emphatically celebrate the positive and the possible.
5. Consciously and directly focus on eradicating the negative and rebuilding around positive norms and beliefs.
6. Develop new stories of success, renewal, and accomplishment.
7. Help those who might succeed and thrive in a new district make the move to a new school (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 127-128).

Similarly, four actions that a principal can take to develop collaborative norms and practices within a school include:

1. ***Announcing and describing*** those norms and practices. State the intention to build collaboration among faculty and take any opportunity to discuss, focus, and reinforce the importance of these practices. Occasions that hold meaning for staff, such as the first staff meeting of the year, are appropriate opportunities to reinforce new norms. These messages need to occur frequently and in a variety of situations “to confirm and specify the desired interactions among teachers” (Little, 1981, p. 13). These messages are intended to provide staff with a clear signal about the importance of collegial practice to the school’s core work.
2. ***Modeling or enacting the desired behavior.*** The principal as well as other staff members can model desired behaviors. The principal should demonstrate his or her own collaborative skills,

conduct classroom walkthroughs that reinforce collaboration, transform staff meetings into time for collegial interaction, and provide time for teachers to work together.

3. ***Sanctioning*** the announced and modeled behavior. Sanction means to endorse or approve collaboration and collegiality. Although principals typically don’t have cash on hand to provide incentives, there are other tools at their disposal, such as by providing: “released time, by visible and public praise for collegial or experimental efforts, by tolerating and absorbing inevitable failures encountered in experimentation” (Little, 1981, p. 13).
4. ***Defending*** the norms. Although collegial norms are positive and powerful, some push-back is inevitable from the established school culture as well as from outside constraints — parents, the district, and others. The courage of the principal’s convictions is required to stand up to these counter-movements. One strategy for the principal to resolve some of these competing forces is to identify common interests rather than focusing on opposing positions (Little, 1981).

Tool 7.9, Culture shift doesn’t occur overnight

— **or without conflict**, focuses on the need to develop a collective commitment to student learning and strategies principals can use to develop that commitment. **Tool 7.10, Student learning grows in professional cultures**, provides a variety of resources and tools designed to assess and shape a school culture that focuses on improved student learning. **Tool 7.11, Pull out negativity by its roots**, identifies values that offset countervailing attitudes and beliefs common in some schools. **Tool 7.12, A new role: Cultural architect**, proposes ways to involve teachers in developing a positive culture within a school. **Tool 7.13, Build the infrastructure first**, describes actions the principal can take to ensure that teachers know

how to collaborate and focus on student learning. Finally, while the focus has been on the school, district office staff play a role in developing trust. **Tool 7.14, The on-ramp to building learning communities**, suggests ways the central office can help teachers and administrators build collaboration skills.

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REFLECTIONS

Developing and sustaining strong trust among members of the school community has been found to be a more powerful reform tool than structural changes in improving student learning. Which groups in your system should read and reflect on the issue of trust. Why do you think that?

This chapter argues that there is a relationship between school culture and productivity. Namely, a positive and collegial culture leads to higher levels of student achievement while supporting educators in reaching high learning standards. Do you have examples from your experience that illustrate the truth of this assertion? That argue against it?

One of the underlying assumptions in this chapter is that school culture can be shaped. Do you believe that premise? Why or why not?

Deal and Peterson propose that school leaders (both principals and teacher leaders) attack negativity within the culture. How should the system support these courageous acts?

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TOOL 7.1 Culture Is...

Purpose: To identify the elements of culture that currently exist within the school

Group Size: 4-5 people

Time: 10-15 minutes per item

Materials: *Culture is...* cut into slips and placed in a box

DIRECTIONS:

1. Form small groups that cross grade levels or content areas within the school. Include those who are new to the school along with those who are veteran to the school.
2. Draw one of the elements of culture from the box; that item becomes the focus of the group conversation.
3. Have each person reflect and write his or her own experience with this aspect of school culture. For example: *The kind of humor I experience in this school would be described as...*
4. Ask each person to read his or her reflections to the other subgroup members. The group then discusses patterns or trends they find among these reflections. Subgroup members write a summary statement for their subgroup and share the summary with the whole group.
5. When a number of items have been discussed and examined, school faculty and the principal discuss this question: "Is this what we want our school culture to be?"
6. The principal or school improvement committee could decide to have these conversations at the beginning of each faculty meeting over the course of a year.

Culture is...

How we meet	Metaphors we use about the school
Our symbols	Our humor
Our stories	Our rituals
Our use of space	Our rewards
How we greet strangers	How we communicate
Our sacred cows	Time issues
How mistakes are dealt with	Our celebrations
Our heroes and heroines	How we learn
How we view hurdles and challenges	Our tribal rules
How we deal with deviance from common practice	How we approach new problems
How we deal with angry parents	How leaders lead
How we get better at what we do	How we induct new people
Our status symbols	Our taboos

Source: Champion, R. (1993). *Tools for change workshops*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

TOOL 7.2 School culture survey**Tools For Schools****COMMENTS TO FACILITATOR**

This tool will help a school assess its culture based on the 12 norms of a healthy school culture identified by Jon Saphier and Mathew King in their article, “Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures,” *Educational Leadership*, March 1985.

The facilitator should prepare individual sheets ahead of the meeting and distribute to participants.

After individuals declare their positions, the facilitator should collect the responses and tabulate privately. The cumulative responses should be shared at the next team meeting. The facilitator should then lead a discussion about possible implications of the responses. *In what areas is there already substantial agreement that the team is performing well together? What areas does this team need to work on? What are some strategies for improvement in that area?*

School culture survey

The professional staff in this school use their talents and knowledge to help each other with challenges and needs.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

This school encourages and supports experimentation with new ideas and techniques.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

This school has high expectations for teachers and administrators.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Staff and students in this school trust and have confidence in each other.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Time and resources are available to support teachers to do their best work.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Teachers and leaders in this school reach out to a knowledge base to inform their work with students and with each other.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Good teaching is recognized and appreciated by the school and community.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

This school culture values caring, celebration, and humor.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

School leaders consistently involve staff in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

School administrators keep meetings and paperwork to a minimum in order to protect teachers’ instructional and planning time.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

The school has traditions in both curriculum and recurrent events that are significant and known by all.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Honest, open communications exist among staff members.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

April/May 2001

TOOL 7.3 An audit of the culture starts with two handy tools

a t i s s u e
C U L T U R E

An audit of the culture starts with two handy tools

By CHRISTOPHER WAGNER
and PENELOPE MASDEN-COPAS

As a pair of facilitators entered a North Carolina middle school, three 7th graders met them at the door. “What are you doing here?” one student asked. “We’re looking for the best middle school in North Carolina,” a facilitator answered. “You found it!” the student exclaimed, and the others heartily agreed. This chance encounter provided the facilitators just one of many clues in assessing the school’s culture.

Schools have tried various improvements to create more effective schools, but many educators and researchers are discovering a “missing link” (Wagner & Hall-O’Phalen, 1998). That missing link has more to do with the school’s culture than with elaborate curriculum alignment projects, scrimmage tests, and the latest buzzword reform efforts. Researchers agree that school culture is an important, but often overlooked, component of school improvement (Levine & Lezotte,

1995; Sizer, 1988; Phillips, 1996; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Frieberg, 1998).

Culture is the bracing for the bridge from previous to future achievement. If the braces are firm and strong, the chances of improving are high. Getting the culture right should always precede “programs” in efforts to raise student achievement. Schools with top-down, “do it or else” staff development plans rarely improve, while schools sensitive to their cultures are successful in improving

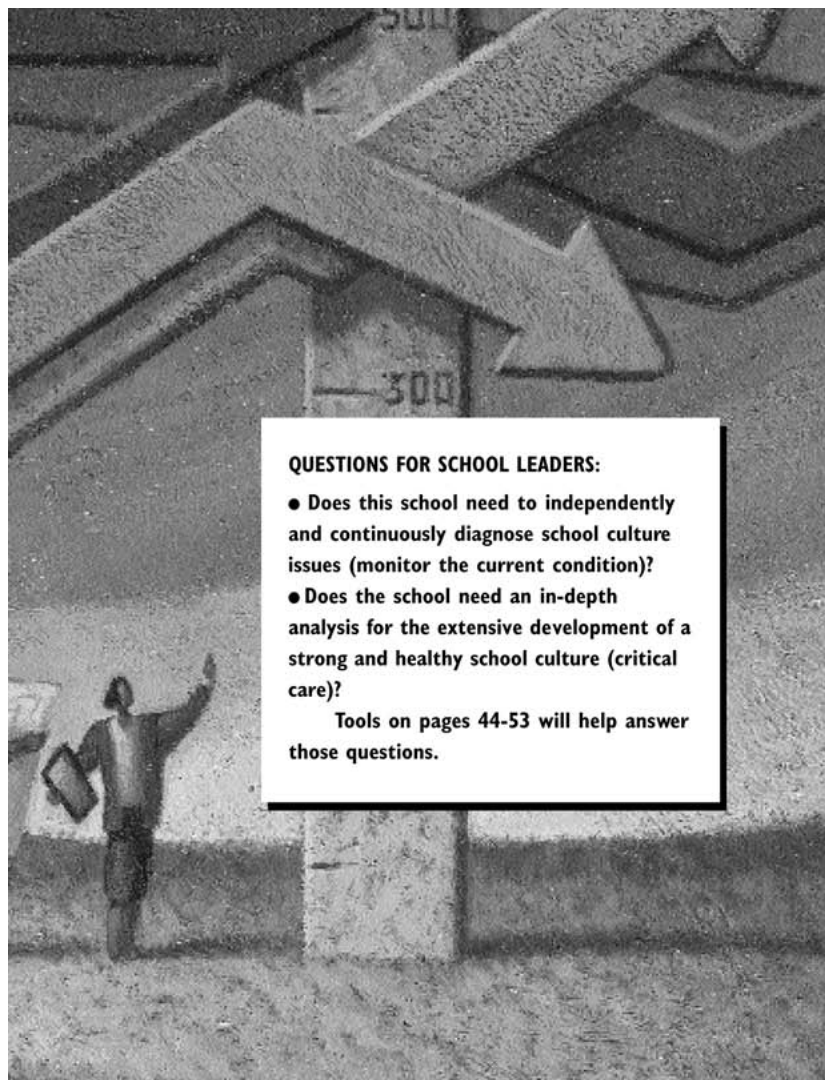
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student learning. As Sheila Patterson, a teacher at South Stokes High School in Walnut Cove, N.C., recently said (personal communication, Oct. 10, 2001), “It’s an attitude, not a program.”

Without a healthy school culture, staff may not be open or receptive to professional learning opportunities. Traditionally, school improvement efforts emphasized an individual teacher learning new skills. The theory was, “If people don’t improve, programs never will.” This belief also promoted the notion of individual professional development as the primary means to school improvement. However, in reality, negative cultures,



QUESTIONS FOR SCHOOL LEADERS:

- Does this school need to independently and continuously diagnose school culture issues (monitor the current condition)?
- Does the school need an in-depth analysis for the extensive development of a strong and healthy school culture (critical care)?

Tools on pages 44-53 will help answer those questions.

colleagues, and environments often overwhelm the best teachers.

The theory of individual professional growth has given way to a culture-centered approach toward professional learning aimed at collegial teams — learning and practicing together. Acknowledging that “unless teams of teachers improve together, schools never will” stresses the culture approach toward improvement and change. The goal of professional development is the inculturation of a continuous improvement philosophy among teams of professionals rather than individual teachers. This can only occur in a healthy school culture

designed to promote higher levels of professional collaboration, collegiality, and self-determination.

Determining the quality and health of the school culture is essential for all schools as they strive to improve. Yet most have not assessed their culture. Educators are more likely to dwell on raising scores and meeting state requirements than to examine a holistic view of the school and the relationships among the people who work, learn, and relate there.

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What is school culture?

Wagner (2000) describes school culture as shared experiences both in and out of school (traditions and celebrations), a sense of community, of family and team.

- Staff stability and common goals permeate the school.
- Curricular and instructional components, as well as order and discipline, are established through consensus.
- Open and honest communication is encouraged and staff demonstrate humor and trust.
- Stakeholders are recognized in schoolwide celebrations.
- The school’s leaders and district leaders provide tangible support.

SOURCE: Wagner, C. (2000, October 20). *School culture analysis*. Address conducted at the meeting of the Manitoba Association of Resource Teachers (MART), Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

MORE INFORMATION about school culture and school culture audits can be obtained from:

- The Center for Improving School Culture
www.schoolculture.net
- The National School Improvement Project
www.garyphillips.com

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SELF-ASSESSMENT: SCHOOL CULTURE TRIAGE

School culture requires consistent care. Determine the current condition of your culture. Do you need simply to monitor and maintain, or are you headed for intensive care?

Instructions: Copy and distribute this survey to teachers and instructional staff in the same school. Have them fill out the form completely, then tally individual scores. Add up individual scores and divide by the number in the group for an average. Compare that number with the Scoring Guide on the next page to determine the health of your culture.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always or almost always
PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION					
1. Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The planning and organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than as separate individuals.	1	2	3	4	5
AFFILIATIVE COLLEGIALLY					
1. Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values	1	2	3	4	5
2. Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each others' company.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Our school reflects a true "sense" of community.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Our school schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by members of our school.	1	2	3	4	5
6. There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations, including holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment.	1	2	3	4	5
SELF-DETERMINATION/EFFICACY					
1. When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.	1	2	3	4	5
2. School members are interdependent and value each other.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The school staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do.	1	2	3	4	5
6. People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here.	1	2	3	4	5

Source: Penelope Masden-Copas

SCORING GUIDE: SCHOOL CULTURE TRIAGE

The lowest triage score is 17 and the highest score is 85. After using the triage questions in several program evaluations, our data suggest the following:

- 17 – 40 =** Critical and immediate attention necessary. Conduct a full-scale assessment of your school's culture and invest all available resources in repairing and healing your school's culture.
- 41 – 60 =** Modifications and improvements are necessary. Begin with a more intense assessment of your school's culture to determine which area is most in need of improvement.
- 60 – 75 =** Monitor and continue to make positive adjustments.
- 76 – 85 =** Amazing! We have never had a score higher than 75! Continue monitoring, though, with each school improvement planning cycle, or at least every two years, to be sure you stay in top shape.

Source: *Penelope Masden-Copas*

Note: To gain the most complete view of your school's culture, this assessment is best taken by all members of the school staff.

SCHOOL CULTURE AUDIT

This school culture assessment has been used successfully in public schools of North Carolina, Florida, and Kentucky over the last decade. It can be used with one school or an entire district. It provides immediate feedback, is cost-effective, and recognizes both strengths and challenges.

What is a School Culture Audit?

What are we looking for in a School Culture Audit? An audit is not a “find a problem and fix it” process. Rather than asking, “What is wrong with this place?” cultural auditors ask, “What, in your opinion, would make this school the best it can be?” School culture is assessed by examining three types of behavior (Phillips, 1993):

- **Professional collaboration**
Do teachers and staff meet and work together to solve instructional, organizational, or curricular issues?
- **Collegial relationships**
Do people enjoy working together, support one another, and feel valued and included?
- **Efficacy/self-determination**
Are people in this school because they want to be? Do they work to improve their skills as professionals, or do they see themselves as victims of a large and uncaring bureaucracy?

Each audit has five steps:

1. Interviews
2. Observations
3. Survey
4. Evaluation
5. Presentation

When combined, information obtained from these different vantage points produce a clear picture of the school’s culture. The facilitators should not be from the school being audited.

Directions

Step One: Interviews — Designate days when the facilitators will interview staff, parents, students, classified staff, and administrators. See Page 47 for more detailed instructions for the interviews.

Step Two: Observations — Designate days when facilitators will make informal observations of the school. These observations include discussions with students, faculty, and other stakeholders. See Pages 48–49 for more detailed instructions for the interviews.

Step Three: Survey — Designate days when representatives of all school community groups will take the school culture survey. See Pages 50–51 for the survey and more detailed instructions about administering the survey.

Step Four: Evaluation — Evaluate what has been learned during the School Culture Audit. See Page 52 for more detailed instructions about evaluating the results.

Step Five: Presentation — Present the findings of the School Culture Audit to the community. See Page 53 for more detailed instructions about the presentation.

Source: *Christopher Wagner*

STEP ONE: INTERVIEWS

Directions to the facilitators

1. Ask the school principal for a designated space for the interviews – a conference room, designated classroom, corner of the media center, or faculty lounge to conduct interviews. Make sure there are beverages and snacks available since most professional staff will be giving up their preparation period.
2. Randomly select groups of five to eight each of faculty members, parents, students, classified staff, and administrators to be interviewed. Interview the various groups separately.
3. Assign at least two facilitators to each group. Explain the process you will be using and how the information that you collect will be used. Tell interviewees that they are not required to answer any question. Do not use a tape recorder – nothing shuts down an interview quite as fast, and you want open, candid responses.
4. Ask each group a series of questions relating to the school's culture. Decide in advance which questions each facilitator will ask. Both facilitators ask questions, take notes, and record direct quotes.
5. Ask vision questions to encourage a positive picture of the future. Instead of asking "what is?," ask "what ought to be?" Keep the group's focus positive and avoid falling into a "woe is me" whining syndrome. Pay attention to the dominant emotions elicited from these "vision" questions:
 - When you awoke this morning and thought about another day in this school (as a teacher, student, custodian, etc.), what was the dominant feeling or emotion you experienced?
 - What factors caused you to feel that way?
 - Think of the previous week in terms of emotional peaks and valleys. Identify some peaks of bliss. Identify some valleys of despair.
 - Imagine a peak of emotional bliss next week as a teacher (student, administrator, etc.). How would you set it up for yourself? Who could you get to help?
6. Identify what is important to the group and how people improve. Look for whether their responses reflect the formal curriculum and stated professional development goals. Do improvement areas reflect the silent curriculum and unstated or spin-off outcomes? Note responses in which people say they are learning from each other or in more formal settings such as planned staff development sessions.
 - As a teacher (student, administrator, etc.), recall one way you have improved in the past year. What is something you are doing differently or better?
 - What were the major forces or who contributed to your improvement?
 - What is one way you would like to improve in the next 12 months? How could you make this happen?
7. Get to the heart of attitudes about differentiated instruction/ student achievement with a question and a follow-up. Typical responses to the first question detail the lack of study habits and poor parenting.
 - How have students changed over the past few years?
 - Since we all agree that students are not the same as they were a few years ago, how have you modified your teaching to reach every child?

Other questions might include:

- If you had the power to make today the best day of teaching you ever had, what would you do?
 - How could we make this staff come together in a unified, collective, and supportive manner?
 - What are some instructional highlights of your day and what can you do to experience them more often?
 - How can teachers make the classified staff feel more valued and respected?
8. Take a few minutes to debrief and compare notes after each interview.
 9. Analyze notes for evidence of the presence or absence of professional collaboration, collegiality, and self-determination. This information will be included in the School Culture Audit report, which will be shared with school stakeholders.

The responses to these questions will begin to yield the emotional status of each group. Facilitators identify sources of dominant emotions and hints for improvement from the "imagined bliss" question.

Source: Christopher Wagner

STEP TWO: OBSERVATIONS

Facilitators make informal observations^{} of the school. These observations include discussions with students, faculty, and other stakeholders.*

Directions to the facilitators

1. Speak with a good cross-section of students and staff.
2. Separate and circulate throughout the school for best results.
3. Look for specific examples of 13 characteristics related to the three types of behavior being evaluated by the audit: **professional collaboration** (teachers planning together, sharing teaching modalities, teaming in their delivery, etc.), **collegiality** (friendly environment, emotional support, continuation of cherished rituals and traditions), and **efficacy/self-determination**. Make a note of each example and determine the degree to which each characteristic is present in the school. Share the notations in the profile presentation. Note both positive and negative examples.

Each of the 13 characteristics listed here is related to those three types of behavior. For example, 3, 4, 6, and 10 support professional collaboration; 1, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, and 13 align with collegiality; and 2 and 9 represent efficacy.

Determine to what degree each of these characteristics is present in the school.

Examples:

- Facilitator observes shared and good-natured (as opposed to mean-spirited) humor in the faculty lounge as an example of characteristic #8.
 - Facilitator observes mutual respect exhibited between teachers and secretarial staff prior to the beginning of the school day. A notation is made on characteristic #1: collegiality.
 - Facilitator observes cooperative effort to secure reading grant and makes a notation regarding #4: experimentation and entrepreneurship, and #9: shared decision making.
4. After the observations, facilitators review notes in a debriefing session. Their notes are shaped and interpreted to more clearly specify the characteristics identified. The data are included in the School Culture Audit report to the staff and school community with all other collected data.

C H A R A C T E R I S T I C S

1. **Collegiality.** The way adults treat each other, i.e., respect and harmony vs. disrespect and discord.
2. **Efficacy.** Feeling of ownership or capacity to influence decisions; i.e., do people tend to live with or solve problems?
3. **High expectations of self and others.** Excellence is acknowledged; improvement is celebrated, supported, and shared.
4. **Experimentation and entrepreneurship.** New ideas abound and invention occurs.
5. **Trust and confidence.** Participants believe in the leaders and each other based on the match between creeds and deeds.
6. **Tangible support.** Improvement efforts are substantive with abundant resources made available by all.
7. **Appreciation and recognition of improvement.** People feel special and act special.
8. **Humor.** Caring is expressed through “kidding” or joking in tasteful ways.
9. **Shared decision making by all participants.** Those affected by a decision are involved in making and implementing the decision.
10. **Shared vision.** Participants understand what’s important and avoid trivial tasks.
11. **Traditions.** The school has identifiable celebrations and rituals that are important to the school community.
12. **Open and honest communication.** Information flows throughout the organization in formal and informal channels. Everyone receives information on a “need-to-know” basis.
13. **Metaphors and stories.** There is evidence of behavior being communicated and influenced by internal imagery.

Source: Christopher Wagner

^{*} Note: Informal observations are not formal supervisory observations.

Tool 5.2 Audit of the culture starts with two handy tools

CHAPTER 5

OBSERVATIONS

- 1. Collegiality.** The way adults treat each other, i.e., respect and harmony vs. disrespect and discord.

- 2. Efficacy.** Feeling of ownership or capacity to influence decisions; i.e., do people tend to live with or solve problems?

- 3. High expectations of self and others.** Excellence is acknowledged; improvement is celebrated, supported, and shared.

- 4. Experimentation and entrepreneurship.** New ideas abound and invention occurs.

- 5. Trust and confidence.** Participants believe in the leaders and each other based on the match between creeds and deeds.

- 6. Tangible support.** Improvement efforts are substantive with abundant resources made available by all.

- 7. Appreciation and recognition of improvement.** People feel special and act special.

- 8. Humor.** Caring is expressed through “kidding” or joking in tasteful ways.

- 9. Shared decision making by all participants.** Those affected by a decision are involved in making and implementing the decision.

- 10. Shared vision.** Participants understand what’s important and avoid trivial tasks.

- 11. Traditions.** The school has identifiable celebrations and rituals that are important to the school community.

- 12. Open and honest communication.** Information flows throughout the organization in formal and informal channels. Everyone receives information on a “need-to-know” basis.

- 13. Metaphors and stories.** There is evidence of behavior being communicated and influenced by internal imagery.

Source: Christopher Wagner

STEP THREE: SURVEY

Directions to the facilitators

- Ask representatives of all school community groups to take the School Culture Survey (*see next page*).
- Assure participants survey responses are anonymous.
- Surveys should be presented and collected in person – mailing is a waste of time and postage.
- Professional staff may complete the survey in 10 to 15 minutes in a faculty meeting. A faculty member collects the surveys at that time.
- The school secretary usually circulates and collects surveys from teaching assistants, other clerical staff, custodians, and bus drivers.
- Administer parent and student surveys immediately after their participation in the interview. Parent surveys also can be distributed during open house, parent/teacher conferences, or at a PTA/PTO meeting.
- A committee (formed for this purpose of an administrator, teacher, clerical staff member, etc., or the school improvement committee) tabulates the responses, creating separate scores for each subgroup to compare.

Tabulating survey results

A standing school committee (such as the school improvement committee) should tabulate the survey results, providing an average for what is perceived to be present and what is perceived to be important for each of the 13 questions.

The committee should then review the averages for gaps in the two numbers on each question. A general rule is that gaps of 3.0 or more need to be addressed.

Example

In the **presence** line for #1: Democratic decision making. Four people circle 2, eight people circle 3, two people circle 4, eight people circle 5, and two people circle 6. The sum of all rankings is 92. The mean, 92 divided by 24 (people) equals 3.8.

Then, in the **importance** line, two people circle 5, three people circle 6, 10 people circle 8, seven people circle 9, and two circle 10. The sum of all rankings is 191. The mean, 191 divided by 24 (people) equals 7.9.

The gap (difference) between importance and present equals 4.1. Conclusion: This school should address the issue of democratic decision making.

Source: Christopher Wagner. Survey adapted from Phillips, G. (1993). *The school-classroom culture audit*. Vancouver, B.C.: Eduserv, British Columbia School Trustees Publishing.

SCHOOL CULTURE SURVEY

Background: The 13 items in this survey have been identified as key indicators of a school's culture. Your opinion and ranking of these factors is important and will be valuable in assessing your school's culture. What is culture? For this survey, culture is defined as the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize the school in terms of:

- How people treat and feel about each other;
- The extent to which people feel included and appreciated; and
- Rituals and traditions reflecting collaboration and collegiality.

Directions: Please rate each item twice. First, rate the item by circling an appropriate number reflecting its PRESENCE in your school. Second, rate the item by circling the appropriate number relative to its IMPORTANCE to you.

I am a: (Please circle one)

Student Teacher aide Custodian Parent
Secretary Administrator Teacher Bus driver Other

1. Democratic and participatory decision making.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

2. Strong leadership from administrators, teachers, or teams of both.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

3. Staff stability-low turnover from year to year.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

4. A planned, coordinated curriculum supported by research and faculty.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

5. Schoolwide selected and agreed-upon staff development.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

6. Parental involvement, engagement, and support.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

7. Schoolwide recognition of success for students and staff.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

8. An effort to maximize active learning in academic areas.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

9. District support for school improvement efforts.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

10. Collaborative instructional planning and collegial relationships.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

11. Sense of community, family, and team.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

12. Clear goals and high expectations for students and staff.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

13. Order and discipline established through consensus and consistent application.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

Please use the space below to make any additional comments about the items on this survey.

Source: Christopher Wagner. Survey adapted from Phillips, G. (1993). *The school-classroom culture audit*. Vancouver, B.C.: Eduserv, British Columbia School Trustees Publishing.

STEP FOUR: EVALUATION

Directions to the facilitators

1. Analyze the data and identify strengths (presence of culture-rich examples) and weaknesses.
2. Organize the analyzed data into a written School Culture Profile answering questions such as:
 - What specific comments (quotes) were expressed about building professional collaboration in this school?
 - What did we observe that would lead us to believe there is a strong sense of collegiality here?
 - Which responses indicate the presence or lack of efficacy?
 - What gaps exist between what is present and what is important as revealed in the survey?
 - How do the survey results compare with information gathered in the interviews and observations?
 - What trends or common themes are revealed in the collected data?
3. If there are no specific examples of professional collaboration, collegiality, and efficacy/self-determination, then point to what is unhealthy about the culture and what is inhibiting improvement. Some examples:
 - When teachers say they feel isolated and want to spend more time with colleagues, there is an obvious lack of opportunity for collegial involvement.
 - If teachers cannot identify a source of help for an instructional dilemma, there is a problem with professional collaboration.
 - Constant complaints about red tape, central office policy and the ever-increasing demands made by the state department reveal the lack of self-determination and efficacy.
4. Present the written profile to the school improvement team and administration before making an oral presentation to the school community.
5. Many schools elect to do a School Culture Audit in the fall and again in the spring as a pre/post instrument.

Source: *Christopher Wagner*

JSD Summer 2002 National Staff Development Council

52

STEP FIVE: PRESENTATION

Directions to the facilitators

1. Use an extended faculty meeting held immediately after school for the presentation, or better, report it at an evening PTA/PTO/School Council meeting. Since the meetings are always positive and extremely informative, schools typically make great efforts to invite the community.
2. Keep the presentation to an hour or less.
3. With two or more facilitators, one facilitator opens the meeting by sharing statements and direct quotes from the interviews. These statements are tied to the big three behaviors: professional collaboration, collegial relationships, efficacy/self-determination.
4. Another facilitator shares notes from the observation, including comments overheard or summaries of discussions. These comments answer the questions: How are people treating each other? What types of behaviors are staff members modeling for the children? How inviting does the school feel? What evidence is there of collaboration, collegiality, and efficacy?
5. Share information from the survey, noting any significant gaps between presence and importance.
6. Conclude with four or five recommendations for improvement. Facilitators also may agree to work with the school improvement team, site-based council, etc., to assist in planning and implementing improvements.
7. Facilitate a discussion among stakeholders about the findings. Addressing the following key questions provides a basis for sustained improvement that has the potential to involve and secure ownership from the entire school community:
 - What areas of our school's culture (professional collaboration, collegiality, efficacy/self-determination) appear to be strongest and why?
 - What can we do as a school community to maintain and/or improve these strengths?
 - What areas of our school's culture (professional collaboration, collegiality, efficacy/self-determination) present the greatest challenge for improvement?
 - What can we as a school community do to improve in these areas?

Source: Christopher Wagner

PRESENTATION TIPS

When presenting to the school community, take care to highlight school culture strengths. There is always something good to say.

A typical statement might be:

"During the interview, several people indicated a desire to develop thematic units with teachers in other disciplines. One teacher said, 'I respect my colleagues and would like the opportunity to just sit down and talk about what they teach. A few years ago, we worked together on a thematic unit. The kids liked it, we got a lot accomplished, and it gave us a chance to teach together. Many of us would like to do that again.' Another teacher reported an interest in learning more teaching strategies from her colleagues.

"Based on the data collected, one of the facilitator's recommendations for strengthening professional collaboration would involve planning time for several volunteers to develop a pilot thematic unit. Once the unit has been taught, the teachers involved could report their experiences to the entire faculty."

TOOL 7.4 Positive or negative

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POSITIVE

A school's culture is always at work, either helping or hindering adult learning. Here's how to see it, assess it, and change it for the better

By KENT D. PETERSON

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Every organization has a culture, that history and underlying set of unwritten expectations that shape everything about the school. A school culture influences the ways people think, feel, and act. Being able to understand and shape the culture is key to a school's success in promoting staff and student learning. As Fullan (2001) recently noted, "Reculturing is the name of the game."

When a school has a positive, professional culture, one finds meaningful staff development, successful curricular reform, and the effective use of student performance data. In these cultures, staff and student learning thrive. In contrast, a school with a negative or toxic culture that does not value professional learning, resists change, or devalues staff development hinders success. School culture will have either a positive or a detrimental impact on the quality and success of staff development.

WHAT IS SCHOOL CULTURE?

School culture is the set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the "persona" of the school. These unwritten expectations build up over time as teachers, administrators, parents, and students work together, solve problems, deal with challenges and, at times, cope with failures. For example, every school has a set of expectations about what can be discussed at staff meetings, what

Collaborative and collegial relationships are part of the culture of a professional learning community.

■
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or NEGATIVE

constitutes good teaching techniques, how willing the staff is to change, and the importance of staff development (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Schools also have rituals and ceremonies — communal events to celebrate success, to provide closure during collective transitions, and to recognize people's contributions to the school. School cultures also include symbols and stories that communicate core values, reinforce the mission, and build a shared sense of commitment. Symbols are an outward sign of inward values. Stories are group representations of history and meaning. In positive cultures, these features reinforce learning, commitment, and motivation, and they are consistent with the school's vision.

POSITIVE VS. TOXIC CULTURES

While there is no one best culture, recent research and knowledge of successful schools identify common features in professional learning communities. In these cultures, staff, students, and administrators value learning, work to enhance curriculum and instruction, and focus on students. In schools with professional learning communities, the culture possesses:

- A widely shared sense of purpose and values;
- Norms of continuous learning and improvement;
- A commitment to and sense of responsibility

for the learning of all students;

- Collaborative, collegial relationships; and

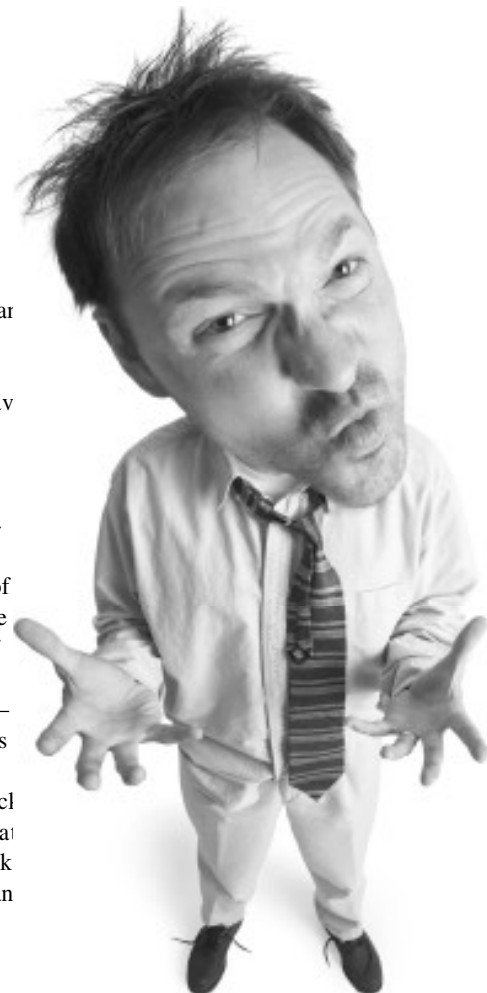
- Opportunities for staff reflection, collective inquiry, and sharing personal practice.

(Stein, 1998; Lambert, 1998; Fullan 2001; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Hord, 1998).

In addition, these schools often have a common professional language, communal stories of success, extensive opportunities for quality professional development, and ceremonies that celebrate improvement, collaboration, and learning (Peterson & Deal, 2002). All of these elements build commitment, forge motivation, and foster learning for staff and students.

Some schools have the opposite — negative subcultures with “toxic” norms and values that hinder growth and learning. Schools with toxic cultures lack a clear sense of purpose, have norms that reinforce inertia, blame students for lack of progress, discourage collaboration, and often have actively hostile relationships among staff. These schools are not healthy for staff or students.

By actively addressing the negativity and working to shape more positive cultures, staff and principals can turn around many of these schools. Principals are key in addressing negativity and hostile relations.



A negative culture can include hostile relationships among staff.

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C U L T U R E

GANADO PRIMARY SCHOOL Ganado Unified School District #20 Ganado, Ariz.

Grades: K-2

Enrollment: 405

Staff: 29 teachers

Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	1%
Black:	0%
Hispanic:	0%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	0%
Native American:	99%
Other:	0%

Limited English proficient: 75%

Languages spoken: Navajo and English

Free/reduced lunch: 92%

Special education: 6.9%

Contact: Sigmund A. Boloz, principal

Ganado Primary School

P.O. Box 1757

Ganado, AZ 86505

Phone: (928) 755-1020

Fax: (928) 755-1085

E-mail:

sigmund.boloz@ganado.k12.az.us

WISCONSIN HILLS MIDDLE SCHOOL School District of Elmbrook Brookfield, Wisc.

Grades: 6-8

Enrollment: 930

Staff: 80 teachers

Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	88%
Black:	4%
Hispanic:	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander:	7%
Native American:	0%
Other:	0%

Limited English proficient: 1%

Languages spoken: English

Free/reduced lunch: 6%

Special education: 12%

Contact: Shelby Cosner, (former principal), coordinator for K-12 Continuous

Improvement for Student Learning

School District of Elmbrook Central

Administration Office

13780 Hope St.

P.O. Box 1830

Brookfield, WI 53008-1830

Phone: (262) 781-3030 ext. 1114

Fax: (262) 783-0983

E-mail: cosners@elmbrook.k12.wi.us

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

School culture enhances or hinders professional learning. Culture enhances professional learning when teachers believe professional development is important, valued, and “the way we do things around here.” Professional development is nurtured when the school’s history and stories include examples of meaningful professional learning and a group commitment to improvement.

Staff learning is reinforced when sharing ideas, working collaboratively to learn, and using newly learned skills are recognized symbolically and orally in faculty meetings and other school ceremonies. For example, in one school, staff meetings begin with the story of a positive action a teacher took to help a student — a ceremonial school coffee cup is presented to the teacher and a round of applause follows.

The most positive cultures value staff members who help lead their own development, create well-defined improvement plans, organize study groups, and learn in a variety of ways. Cultures that celebrate, recognize, and support staff learning bolster professional community.

Negative cultures can seriously impair staff development. Negative attitudes and values, hostile relations, and pessimistic stories deplete the culture of one school, for example, the only staff development depicted is boring, ill-defined failures. Positive experiences are attacked — they don’t fit the cultural norms. In another school, teachers are socially ostracized for sharing their positive experiences at workshops or training programs. At this school’s faculty meetings, no one is allowed to share interesting or useful ideas learned in a workshop. Positive news about staff development opportunities goes underground for those who still value personal learning (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

In some schools, professional development is not valued, teachers do not

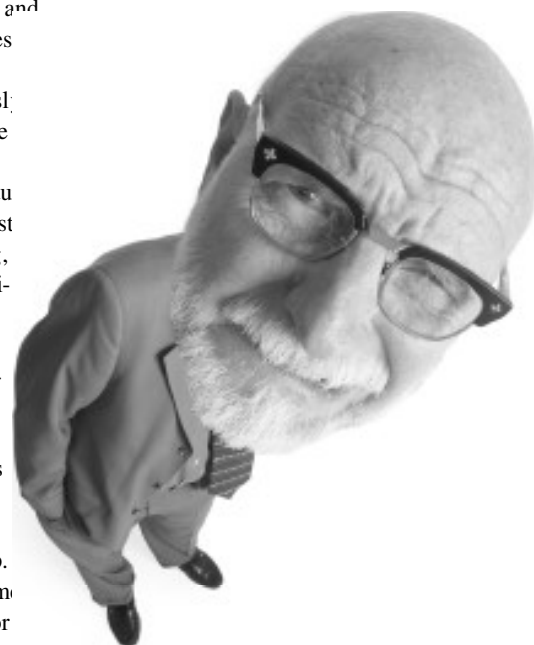
believe they have anything new to learn, or they believe the only source for new ideas is trial-and-error in one’s own classroom. Anyone who shares a new idea from a book, workshop, or article is laughed at.

In these schools, positive views of professional learning are countercultural. Those who value learning are criticized. The positive individuals may either leave the school (reinforcing the culture) or become outcasts, seeking support with like-minded staff.

POSITIVE PORTRAIT

Ganado Primary School

One of the best examples of a school culture that supports professional development is Ganado Primary School in Ganado, Ariz. Located in one of the poorest counties in America in the Four Corners area of the Southwest, Ganado did not always have a strong professional community. Over time, Sigmund Boloz, the principal, and his staff developed a strong, professional culture that supports staff and student learning.



**teachers do not believe
they have anything new to learn.**

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Everyone in the school is viewed as a learner: staff, students, principal, community members. Opportunities for learning abound. For example, all teachers have support to be trained in a reading intervention program called CLIP (Collaborative Literacy Intervention Project). Teachers are invited to regular “curriculum conversations” to discuss new ideas and share experiences.

The presence of a staff professional library symbolically communicates the importance of learning. The school has amassed 4,000 professional books and 400 videotapes on effective teaching and other professional issues. The community has an academy for parents every year to help improve parenting skills. New learning is encouraged and supported. Staff members feel responsible for improving their own skills and knowledge to help students learn. They regularly recount stories of successfully using new ideas. The staff expects and encourages collaboration and sharing. In short, professional learning is valued in the culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999).

Wisconsin Hills Middle School

Shelby Cosner, the first principal of Wisconsin Hills Middle School in Brookfield, Wisc., hoped to build a school culture that valued and sustained professional learning. It did not occur immediately. Initial hiring brought in a strong staff, but from many different schools.

Over time, she and the staff developed a culture that nurtured and valued professional learning. She and her staff envisioned a culture where staff members were interested in job-embedded learning, passionate about professional development, and committed to collaborative dialogue about teaching. She sought teachers who were likely to share these values, but the culture was actively nurtured through symbols, stories, and traditions as well as quality professional learning.

For example, the staff discussed and developed a set of core themes and values that guided learning. They scheduled



Principals can learn the history of the school by talking to the school's storytellers — they are the staff who enjoy recounting history.

regular “D” Days (staff development days) every other Thursday. They always shared food during meetings, a communal symbol of collegiality and a bond for the group as it studied new approaches to differentiating instruction and integrating technology. Sharing food became a school ritual. A new department provided the food each meeting. One team brought different ice cream treats to symbolize their learning to differentiate their teaching to address varied students’ needs and interests.

Each “D” Day meeting began with professional or personal stories of celebration. Staff shared stories about what a student had accomplished or a personal story about themselves or their families. Humor and joking became measures of connectedness. Eventually, teachers made storytelling into a contest, with the staff voting for the best funny classroom or school story and the winner receiving a “Fabulous Prize.” Stories were then shared in the regular school newsletter,

the “Grapevine.” These rituals brought them together around humor and stories.

Study groups also helped extend the culture as teams investigated new approaches to their craft. The deep discussions that transpired drew people together around shared ideas.

Beginning- and end-of-school traditions reinforced the culture. Staff planted seeds one spring to symbolize the “planting and growing” that was occurring through their investment in professional development. In June, a documentary video that showcased the year’s accomplishments and milestones was shared. In all these activities, staff shaped, nurtured, and reinforced the culture. Eventually, a deep commitment to collaborative, job-embedded staff development became “the way we do things around here.”

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Principals and other school leaders can and should shape school culture. They do this through three key processes. First,

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they read the culture, understanding the culture's historical source as well as analyzing current norms and values. Second, they assess the culture, determining which elements of the culture support the school's core purposes and the mission, and which hinder achieving valued ends. Finally, they actively shape the culture by reinforcing positive aspects and working to transform negative aspects of the culture (Peterson & Deal, 2002).

READ THE CULTURE

Principals can learn the history of the school by talking to the school's storytellers (they are the staff who enjoy recounting history), looking through prior school improvement plans for signals about what is really important, not just what is required, or using a faculty meeting to discuss what the school has experienced, especially in staff development, over the past two decades. It is important to examine contemporary aspects of the culture — a series of exercises can determine the core norms and values, rituals, and ceremonies of the school, and their meanings. For example, asking each staff member to list six adjectives to describe the school, asking staff to tell a story that characterizes what the school is about, or having staff write metaphors describing the school can reveal aspects of the school culture.

One approach asks staff to complete the following metaphor: "If my school were an animal it would be a _____, because _____."

The principal then looks for themes and patterns. Are the animals strong, nurturing, hostile, loners, or herd animals? Are the animals stable or changeable? These metaphors can suggest deeper perceptions of the culture.

Finally, developing a timeline of rituals and ceremonies for the year — asking when they occur, what symbols and values are important in each, and what the ceremonies communicate about the school and its commitment to professional learning — can fill in the culture picture. For example, what does the end-of-the year staff gathering communicate?



Fill in the culture picture by developing a timeline of rituals and ceremonies for the year — asking when they occur, what symbols and values are important in each, and what the ceremonies communicate about the school and its commitment to professional learning.

Is it joyful, sorrowful, congenial, or standoffish? What are the rites and rituals of the gathering? What traditions keep going year-to-year, and what do they represent? Is the last gathering of the year a time for closure, goodbyes, and a sharing of hopes for the future?

ASSESS THE CULTURE

Staff and administrators should then look at what they have learned about the culture and ask two central questions:

- What aspects of the culture are positive and should be reinforced?
- What aspects of the culture are negative and harmful and should be changed?

The staff can also ask: What norms and values support learning? Which depress or hinder the growth of energy, motivation, and commitment? What symbols or ceremonies are dead and dying and need to be buried — or need to be resuscitated?

There are other approaches as well. One way to assess the culture is to use the School Culture Survey (*Tools for Schools*, 2001) to examine core norms and values. Collect the survey results to see how strongly held different norms or values are, then determine whether they fit the culture the school wants.

SHAPE THE CULTURE

There are many ways to reinforce the positive aspects of the culture.

Staff leaders and principals can:

- Celebrate successes in staff meetings and ceremonies;
- Tell stories of accomplishment and collaboration whenever they have the opportunity; and
- Use clear, shared language created during professional development to foster a commitment to staff and student learning.

Leaders also can reinforce norms and values in their daily work, their words, and their interactions. They can establish rituals and traditions that make staff development an opportunity for culture building as well as learning. As we saw at Wisconsin Hills Middle School, all workshops began with sharing food and stories of success with students. At other times, leaders can reinforce quality professional learning by providing additional resources to implement new ideas, by recognizing those committed to learning their craft, and by continuously supporting quality opportunities for informal staff learning and collaboration.

a t i s s u e

C U L T U R E

Staff and administrators may also need to change negative and harmful aspects of the culture. This is not easy. It is done by addressing the negative directly, finding examples of success to counteract stories of failure, impeding those who try to sabotage or criticize staff learning, and replacing negative stories of professional development with concrete positive results.

CONCLUSION

Today, shaping culture is even more important because of the national focus on higher curriculum standards, assessments, and accountability.

Standards-based reform efforts attempt to align content, teaching, and assessment. But without a culture that supports and values these structural changes, these reforms can fail.

Schools need both clear structures and strong, professional cultures to foster teacher learning. Carefully designed curriculum and assessments are keys to successful reform, along with teacher professional development. The school's culture either supports or sabotages quality professional learning. Developing and sustaining a positive, professional culture that nurtures staff learning is the task of everyone in the school. With a strong, positive culture that supports professional development and student learning, schools can become places where every teacher makes a difference and every child learns.

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RESOURCES

- *Shaping School Culture Fieldbook*, by Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson. (Jossey-Bass, 2002).

This new book describes ways to shape school culture. It includes concrete tactics, reflective questions, and group activities that can be used with school staffs to read, assess, and transform their cultures.

- “Shared Culture:A Consensus of Individual Values,” by Joan Richardson. *Results*. May 2001.

This article describes a school that has developed a deep professional culture. Excellent concrete examples are provided of how one school shaped its culture.

- “School Culture Survey.” *Tools For Schools*, April/May 2001.

This survey can be used with school staffs to assess underlying norms and values. The survey provides an excellent tool for assessing the culture.

- “Norms Put the Golden Rule Into Practice for Groups,” by Joan Richardson. *Tools For Schools*, August/September 1999.

This article discusses the importance of positive norms and ways to build these group norms with a school team. A wealth of suggestions can be used to build positive group norms.

Stein, M. (1998). *High performance learning communities District 2: Report on Year One implementation of school learning communities. High performance training communities project*. Washington,DC: Office of Educational Research

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TOOL 7.5 Change agent

interview / MICHAEL FULLAN



Michael Fullan

PHOTO BY PETER CATON / GERALD CAMPBELL STUDIOS, TORONTO

BY DENNIS SPARKS

JSD: When I first interviewed you 10 years ago for an NSDC publication, you said, “We know that the best way for people to learn about new policies and innovations is through interaction with other people.” Some types of interaction are more helpful than others, though, and I’d like to hear your views on the kinds of relationships that are most powerful in promoting innovations in teaching and leadership for the benefit of students.

Fullan: It has become increasingly clear from various sources that we need professional learning communities in which teachers and leaders

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Change agent

‘We’re talking about a change in the culture of schools and a change in the culture of teaching’

work together and focus on student learning. But they must be infused with high-quality curriculum materials and assessment information about student learning. David Cohen and Heather Hill, for instance, describe three policy levers — assessment, curriculum, and teacher learning. They say if those levers aren’t pulled together, schools can’t get very far. Milbrey McLaughlin and Joan Talbert found two types of learning communities. In one of them, teachers work together to innovate to improve their teaching practices. In the second type, teachers interacted around their traditional teaching practices, which simply reinforced those things that weren’t working in the first place.

This research tells us two things. First, we need far more intensive professional learning within a culture of continuous deliberation. Second, it has to be continually tested by external ideas or standards about best practices. Outside curriculum ideas and student assessment information help ensure that the process isn’t too insular.

SPREAD POSITIVE DEVIANCE

JSD: Virtually all schools have some teachers who produce high levels of learning for students. In addition to drawing on outside sources of

knowledge, a powerful way to improve the quality of teaching in schools, it seems to me, is to spread the practices of these “positive deviant teachers” throughout the school.

Fullan: The effective schools research found that classroom-to-classroom differences in effectiveness within schools is greater than school-to-school variation. Professional learning communities internal to a school should reduce the variation across classrooms with more and more teachers gravitating toward the best practices.

Positive deviant teachers can be used within and across schools. They have to get outside their classrooms, though, both within their schools and to link to what’s going on in other schools — to learn from other teachers as well as contribute to them.

CULTURE IS KEY

JSD: In the May 2002 issue of *Educational Leadership*, you wrote an article about leadership for cultural change. Before we turn to what you said, I’d like you to respond to something Roland Barth said in that same issue: “Probably the most important — and the most difficult — job of an

“We need far more intensive professional learning within a culture of continuous deliberation.”

instructional leader is to change the prevailing culture of a school. ... A school's culture has far more influence on life and learning in the schoolhouse than the president of the country, the state department of education, the superintendent, the school board, or even the principal, teachers, and parents can ever have." Of course, while the principal, teachers, and parents can have a large effect on a school's culture, Barth is writing about the power of a school's culture to shape professional learning and student achievement.

Fullan: Barth's observation is right on. The question for me, though, is how we get high-quality cultures in schools on a large scale. The two themes we've been interested in since 1990 have been large-scale reform and sustainability.

"The two themes we've been interested in since 1990 have been large-scale reform and sustainability."

For the past four years, we have been working in England evaluating that country's literacy and numeracy strategies. Test scores in these areas have significantly increased from 1996 to 2002. While we've acknowledged their success, we've said that this is just a baby step in terms of deeper changes that are necessary. These deeper changes involve closing the achievement gap between high and low performers, developing students' thinking and problem-solving skills, attending to students' social and emotional development, and fundamentally changing the culture of schools.

English policy makers have devised an interesting formulation. Imagine a four-part table. One dimension contrasts teachers who are knowledge-poor with those who are knowledge-rich, which can be termed uninformed or informed. The other dimension contrasts prescription and professional judgment as sources of

action. When you cross these dimensions you get a very revealing look at the last four decades of reform.

In the 1970s, "uninformed professional judgment" guided teaching. In the 1980s, "uninformed prescriptions" provided through the accountability movement were a driving force. In the 1990s, England had what it called "informed prescription" because the prescription was based on sound knowledge and curriculum.

"Informed professional judgment" is now the goal in England. We are talking with English policy makers about the kinds of strategies that are necessary to go from the informed prescriptions that have helped them make progress in literacy and numeracy to informed professional judgment that would actually change the cultures of schools. These policies would reduce the unnecessary workload of teachers, create more contact time among teachers to improve what they are doing, and develop more effective leadership at all levels.

INVEST IN LEADERS

JSD: In your article in that same issue of *Educational Leadership*, you said that "Cultural change principals display palpable energy, enthusiasm, and hope." It's my sense that many principals today feel more resigned than hopeful because they often feel caught between very difficult problems that require resolution and other people's prescriptions for how they should be solved.

Fullan: Investment in leadership development is important. Getting beyond resignation and the passive dependency that has been created by the prescriptions of the past 10 years requires a different kind of socialization for principals. In England, they have created the National College of School Leadership to develop leaders on a much larger scale. In District 2 in New York City, they deliberately built the capacity of principals

MICHAEL FULLAN

POSITION: Michael Fullan is dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. He also is a researcher, consultant, trainer, and policy adviser on a wide range of educational change projects with school systems, teachers federations, research and development institutes, and government agencies in Canada and internationally. He has published widely on the topic of educational change.

EDUCATION: Fullan has bachelor's, master's, and doctorate degrees in sociology from the University of Toronto.

PROFESSIONAL HISTORY: He has served as policy implementation adviser to the Minister of Education and Training (Ontario) on the Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, was dean of the faculty of education at the University of Toronto, and assistant academic director and professor of sociology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). He has also served as chairperson and professor in the OISE Department of Sociology.

BOOKS: His most recent books are *Leading in a Culture of Change* (Jossey-Bass, 2001), for which he received the National Staff Development Council's Book of the Year Award for 2002, and *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, 3rd Edition (Teachers College Press, 2001). He has also published *Change Forces: The Sequel* (Falmer Press, 1999), *Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform* (Falmer Press, 1993), and the *What's Worth Fighting For* series (Teachers College Press).

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: An innovator and leader in teacher education, Fullan has developed a number of partnerships designed to bring about major school improvement and educational reform. He is currently leading the evaluation team conducting a four-year assessment of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy in England. He is also conducting with colleagues training, research and evaluation of literacy initiatives in several school districts, including the Toronto School District Board, York Region, Peel and Edmonton Catholic School District.

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through various processes such as intervisitations during which principals developed deeper understanding not only of their own schools, but other schools as well.

IMPROVE RELATIONSHIPS

JSD: In your article, you also wrote, “The single factor common to successful change is that relationships improve. If relationships improve, schools get better. If relationships remain the same or get worse, ground is lost.” I’m curious about what you’ve learned about affecting the quality of relationships in schools among teachers and between teachers and principals.

Fullan: Through our districtwide training of school teams, we’ve learned that structural barriers make it difficult for people to have time to get together and that cultural barriers cause teachers to resist interacting with each other in new ways.

To address these problems, we offer seven or eight days of training a year for teams that include the principal and two teacher leaders. We provide evidence of the connection between well-executed professional learning communities and student learning. We also provide skills in areas such as dealing with resistance. We teach about assessment, and teachers look at student work. As a result, student learning improves and teachers become ambassadors to teachers in other schools.

LIMIT EXTERNAL SOLUTIONS

JSD: In your *Educational Leadership* article, you wrote, “Creating and sharing knowledge is central to effective leadership,” and “Principals not attuned to leading in a culture of change make the mistake of seeking external innovations and taking on too many projects.” And in the third edition of *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (Teachers College Press, 2001), you observed,

“Ultimately, no amount of outside intervention can produce the motivation and specificity of best solutions for every setting.” Many teachers and principals don’t see their work as knowledge generation and dissemination and often, for a number of reasons, feel very dependent on external innovations and experts. Yet you are saying that it may be a mistake to seek external innovation.

Fullan: People in schools should not take shortcuts in their search for clarity and solutions. They need to engage with all kinds of ideas to improve what they are doing, but not adopt external programs that foster dependency. I want schools to constantly sift and integrate the best ideas from the field, not adopt external programs.

Whole-school reform models make the mistake of thinking that a comprehensive external reform model will solve the coherence problem within schools. It doesn’t work because it feeds into the dependency of teachers and principals. In other words, when schools or districts adopt external models, which in itself is not always a bad thing, they fail to focus on changing the culture of the school, and consequently the models fail to become embedded.

In my view, teaching is an intellectual and scientific profession, as well as a moral profession. That means that schools have to constantly process knowledge about what works and that teachers have to see themselves as scientists who continuously develop their intellectual and investigative effectiveness.

When I look at cases of successful businesses, I see explicit discussion about knowledge development and knowledge sharing. Collaboration as an end in itself was not the goal; what these businesses cared about was whether people in the organization added knowledge and contributed to other people’s knowledge development.

The cognitive sciences teach us that if information is to become knowledge, a social process is required. This makes great pedagogical sense. Information stays as information until people work through it together in solving problems and achieving goals. This is why assessment literacy, when teachers collectively focus on student performance and develop action plans to improve it, is so powerful. Changing the culture is even more important because it establishes norms of continuous interaction. So, information becomes knowledge through a social process, and knowledge becomes wisdom through sustained interaction.

BUILD TEACHER DEPTH

JSD: What have the cognitive sciences taught us about helping educators develop deep understanding of innovations as opposed to skimming their surface features?

Fullan: If you don’t have a strategy conducive to teacher understanding, you can’t get to student understanding. Part of the problem is that the culture of schools is amenable to superficial rather than deep solutions. As David Cohen, Richard Elmore, and others have argued, teachers need daily, in-depth opportunities to build up the knowledge and capacity to carry out the deeper reforms envisaged in the best curriculum frameworks. This requires a radical change in the norms and working conditions of teachers and administrators and, in fact, the teaching profession as a whole.

“The culture of schools is amenable to superficial rather than deep solutions.”

ASSUMPTIONS SHAPE PRACTICE

JSD: You’ve written about the relationship between educators’ beliefs and their practices. In *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, you wrote, “The assumptions we make about change are powerful and fre-

quently subconscious sources of action.” The same might be said about educators’ assumptions about learning, teaching, and leadership.

Fullan: Leaders who are effective operate from powerful conceptions, not from a set of techniques. The key, then, is to build up leaders’ conceptions of what it means to be a leader. I’ve identified five conceptions — moral purpose, relationship building, knowledge generation, understanding the change process, and coherence building. These conceptions can be fostered, but they must be fostered through a socialization process that develops leaders as reflective practitioners. If leaders are taught techniques without conceptions, the techniques will fail. Techniques are tools that must serve a set of conceptual understandings. When conceptions and techniques go hand-in-hand, we create breakthroughs.

LEADERS MUST RECULTURE

JSD: You’ve written, “Educational change is technically simple and socially complex,” and “Never a

checklist, always complexity. There is no step-by-step shortcut to transformation; it involves the hard, day-to-day work of reculturing.”

Fullan: We’re talking about a change in the culture of schools and a change in the culture of teaching. We know that when we think about change we have to get ownership, participation, and a sense of meaning on the part of the vast majority of teachers. You can’t get ownership through technical means; you have to get it through interaction, through developing people, through attention to what students are learning.

Reculturing is the main work of leadership, and it requires an underlying conceptualization of the key elements that feed it. One of the conceptualizations I mentioned a moment ago is moral purpose. Sustainability is based on changes in

the social and moral environment. Moral purpose is more than passionate teachers trying to make a difference in their classrooms. It’s also the context of the school and district in which they work. That means principals have to be almost as concerned about the success of other schools in the district as they are about their own schools.

The strategies that have provided some initial success in areas such as literacy and numeracy are not the strategies, though, that will take us to a deeper transformation that will enact the cogni-

tive science agenda of problem solving and thinking skills, reculture schools, and close the gap between high- and low-performing students.

To achieve these ends, we must tap the energy that comes from moral purpose. We are now just at the very early stages of a qualitative transformation that is a revolution in the teaching profession. ■

Moral purpose is more than passionate teachers trying to make a difference in their classrooms. It’s also the context of the school and district in which they work.

TOOL 7.6 'Collaboration lite' puts student achievement on a starvation diet

leading edge / RICK DuFOUR

'Collaboration lite' puts student achievement on a starvation diet

In my previous column, I argued that 1) a professional is obligated to seek and apply best practice when serving clients; 2) it is evident that the best practice for meeting the needs of students and improving professional practice in schools is to build a collaborative culture; and 3) educational leaders should, therefore, focus their improvement efforts on building a collaborative culture in their districts and schools.

Calls for a collaborative culture come from leading educational researchers who use unusually emphatic language. Milbrey McLaughlin and Joan Talbert (2001) found that effective high schools and effective departments within high schools were characterized by powerful professional collaboration. Kenneth Eastwood and Karen Seashore Louis (1992) concluded that creating a collaborative environment featuring cooperative problem solving was the single most important factor in successful school restructuring. Fred Newmann and Gary Wehlage (1995) found that nurturing a professional collaborative culture was one of the most significant factors in successful school improvement efforts. Judith Warren Little (1990) advised that effective collaboration between teachers was linked to gains in student achievement, higher quality solutions to problems, increased self-efficacy among all staff, more systematic assistance to beginning teachers, and an expanded pool of ideas, methods, and materials that benefited all teachers.

But what is collaboration? Although school and district leaders acknowledge the benefits of a collaborative culture, they often have different ideas about what constitutes collaboration. Many equate collaboration with congeniality. They point to the camaraderie of the group — the secret Santa exchanges, recognition of birthdays, Friday afternoon social gatherings — as evidence of a collaborative culture.

Other leaders believe they are building a collaborative culture when they engage staff in developing consistent operational guidelines and procedures. They attempt to build consensus on how teachers respond to routine issues

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such as tardiness, students failing to complete homework, the supervision rotation for recess, whether the school permits classroom parties, and so on.

Some leaders cite teachers' willingness to work together to create schoolwide programs and events as evidence of a collaborative culture. They contend, correctly, that staff must demonstrate high levels of cooperation to plan and execute the annual school picnic, science fair, or career day. Elementary principals may point to how well their teachers work together to build a schedule that allows students to move from one classroom to another for instruction in specific content. Many leaders organize the staff into committees to oversee school operations — discipline, technology, social, community involvement, etc.

All the initiatives and projects described have, at one time or another, been offered as examples of a school's commitment to collaboration. All of the activities can be worthwhile. Although there is little evidence that teacher congeniality and social interactions impact student achievement (Marzano, 2003), life is certainly more pleasant if we enjoy the company of those with whom we work. Including the staff in decisions about school procedures is generally preferable to unilateral decrees from the principal. Special schoolwide events can enrich students' experience. Coordinated teacher schedules can allow teachers to capitalize on individual strengths in meeting students' needs. Schoolwide committees can encourage all staff to take an interest in the school beyond their classrooms and expand leadership opportunities. I am not criticizing any of these practices. However, none of these can transform a school.

Leaders determined to impact student achievement must not settle for congeniality, coordination, delegating responsibilities, or any form of "collaboration lite." They must promote a collaborative culture by defining collaboration in narrow terms: the systematic process in which we work together to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results.

The first key term in this definition is systematic. Teachers are not invited or encouraged to collaborate. Collaboration is embedded in the routine practices of the school. Teachers are organized into teams and provided time to meet during the school day. They are provided specific guidelines and asked to engage in specific activities that help them focus on student achievement. Teams



In each issue of *JSD*, Rick DuFour writes about effective leadership. His columns can be found at www.nsdc.org/library/dufour.html.

True collaboration does not happen by chance or by invitation. It happens only when leaders commit to creating the systems that embed collaboration in the routine practices of the school and when they provide teachers and teams with the information and support essential to improve practice.

center dialogue around three critical questions:

- What is it we want our students to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned it?
- How can we improve on current levels of student achievement?

None of this happens by chance. School leaders develop procedures to ensure all staff work together to focus constantly on those key questions.

Second, the process is designed to impact professional practice. Staff members do more than analyze, reflect, discuss, or debate. They use collaboration as a catalyst to change their practices. They continuously look for more effective ways to help all students learn.

Third, the effectiveness of the collaborative process is assessed on results rather than perceptions, projects, or positive intentions. Teams identify and pursue specific, measurable, results-oriented goals and look for evidence of student achievement as the barometer of their success. They shift the focus from teacher inputs (for example, whether teachers accomplished their goal of creating a new unit or implementing a new strategy) to student outcomes — evidence that students are learning at higher levels.

Leaders foster powerful professional collaboration when they engage teams of teachers in 1) clarifying the essential knowledge and skills of a particular grade level, course, or unit of instruction; 2) developing common assessments of student learning; 3) analyzing results to identify areas of strength and weakness for both individual teachers and the team; and 4) establishing specific goals and action plans to improve student achievement.

Schools cannot achieve the systematic, results-oriented collaboration that impacts teacher practice unless teachers have both comparative student achievement data and collegial support.

Teachers may work together to identify common outcomes and develop common assessments. If, however, each teacher has access only to the results of his or her students, without any comparison to other students in the school, team members will not be able to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of their

individual instruction.

There is a big push for schools to be more data-driven these days, but simply providing data to schools and teachers does not translate into improved practice. Even teachers who work in isolation can bury themselves in data. For every assessment a teacher administers, he or she can establish the mean, median, mode, range, percentage of As, percentage of Fs, standard deviations, and a host of other statistical facts for the test in general and for specific skills within the test. But unless teachers have a valid basis for comparison, they are denied insight into what they have done well and what areas are most in need of improvement.

Teachers who have the benefit of this useful information on a frequent, timely basis, along with support from a collaborative team, describe the process as energizing. But true collaboration does not happen by chance or by invitation. It happens only when leaders commit to creating the systems that embed collaboration in the routine practices of the school and when they provide teachers and teams with the information and support essential to improve practice.

Effective school leaders will not settle for what is now passing for collaboration in many schools. They will, instead, work with staff to create a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and impact professional practice to improve their individual and collective results.

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TOOL 7.7 Community means more than teamwork

Community means more than teamwork

By Ann Lieberman

The concept of “professional community” is one of the most powerful ideas affecting research and practice in staff development in the last decade. While the idea that teachers need a professional community, that teachers who are supported by their colleagues are more likely to support students in their work, seems obvious, “it ain’t necessarily so.”

A community can also support traditional norms of practice, blaming students’ family conditions, ethnicity, and lack of competence, instead of taking responsibility for rethinking their own pedagogy and practice. McLaughlin and Talbert, (1993) in their now well-known study of a number of secondary schools, first called our attention to the fact that teachers’ professional communities can enable or constrain teacher learning. They found that schools differed significantly when their professional communities were measured by (a) collegiality, (b) support for learning, (c) faculty innovativeness, and (d) professional commitment.

During their five-year study, they observed that teachers who took risks and were continually

inventing new ways of working with students were also developing a positive learning community with their peers and creating new norms of collegiality and openness. In this respect, they were also building a counterforce to those teachers who blamed students for their lack of success, rather than looking to the school, the department, and their own ways of working as needing change and improvement.

Subsequently, Newmann and Wehlage found that a self-conscious professional community was a characteristic of schools that were deliberately “restructuring” and were most successful with students. Professional community was made up of three salient features:

- Teachers pursued a clear, shared purpose for all students’ learning;
- Teachers engaged in collaborative activity to achieve their purposes; and
- Teachers took collective responsibility for student learning.

Through this national sample of K-12 schools, the concept of professional community was now further defined as an innovative school context within which teachers learn new ways to work

Journal of Staff Development, Spring 1999 (Vol. 20, No. 2)

with students, build organizational supports that encourage teachers to collaborate, and engage students in more active forms of authentic learning.

EXTERNAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Many teachers still feel isolated from their peers and go outside their school to find community for their own growth, development, and support in reform networks, school-university partnerships, and a variety of consortia and coalitions. While networks are a powerful force, they're also quite fragile. (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1997).

Networks are powerful because teachers learn in a supportive environment, feel supported in taking risks, and find colleagues who openly talked about shared concerns — qualities missing in their home schools.

The fragility of the networks is manifested in the organizational tensions that networks must embrace: negotiating between larger purposes and the dailiness of activities that constitute a network's "work;" finding a balance between "inside-knowledge" of practitioners and "outside knowledge" of reformers and researchers; building collaborative governance structures neither too centralized nor too decentralized; being informal and flexible rather than rigidly holding on to forms and activities that no longer work; and deciding how inclusive or exclusive membership should be.

Teachers are ambivalent about sharing what they have developed over the years or accepting research knowledge of scholars and reformers. Networks embrace this tension when they recognize teachers' knowledge as legitimate and important. When this happens, teachers become more open to the outside — to their own peers as well as to other scholars and researchers. This aspect of community is critical — it builds commitment to lifelong learning and the confidence and self-

respect necessary to inquire into one's own practice as well as the practice of others.

Understanding "inquiry" as a centerpiece of community

But what are the conditions under which teachers feel comfortable inquiring into their own practice? Cochran-Smith and Lytle (in press) describe three different conceptions of teacher learning and the assumptions underlying each conception. They describe:

- Knowledge for practice — research knowledge to be applied by teachers;
- Knowledge in practice — knowledge that teachers gain through experience; and
- Knowledge of practice — knowledge that treats teaching and learning as problematic.

Each of these conceptions interprets teacher learning differently. However, only when teachers see their own practice as problematic and adopt inquiry do they become involved in "challenging their own assumptions; identifying issues of practice; studying their own students and classrooms" (p.43). Seeing knowledge in this way encourages teachers to use their own experience, and the research and practice of others, as they seek to improve. Central to this kind of inquiry is a professional community where teachers help each other frame and name, not only the problems of practice, but also the problems of the larger context of which the school is a part.

And, inevitably as teachers become more conscious of their position in the school, they become more aware of their position in the world.

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TOOL 7.8 Trust is the on-ramp to building collaboration and collegiality

Trust is the on-ramp to building collaboration and collegiality

I recently listened to teachers who concluded that new forms of job-embedded professional development could not be successful without trust. Trust, it seemed, needed to be developed between and among staff members as well as between the principal and staff in order for teachers to embark on new and seemingly risky form of professional development.

Bryk and Schneider's (2003) longitudinal study of 400 Chicago elementary schools reached the same conclusion: "Recent research shows that social trust among teachers, parents, and school leaders improves much of the routine work of schools and is a key resource for reform" (p. 40). They concluded that relational trust is central to building effective educational communities.

Trust, according to the authors, is elusive, engaging, and essential to meaningful school improvement. Trust is the expectation that another's word, promise, or statement can be relied upon (Rotter, 1980). Relational trust involves more than creating high morale; it is developed through ongoing interaction each day as people work together on improving student learning.

To encourage and build teacher collaboration and use job-embedded professional development strategies, principals need to **build a school culture that is characterized by trust** (Roy & Hord, 2003). Trust, in a school setting, involves **making educational decisions that put the interests of students above personal and political interests**. Trust is built when teachers believe student welfare and high levels of learning are the foundation of school decisions. When decisions seem to be based on personal or political factors, trust erodes.

Collaboration:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate.

The principal also **needs to keep his or her word**. When principals do what they say and follow-up with promised actions, staff members can believe their words. Principals also need to **believe in teacher ability and willingness to fulfill their responsibilities effectively**. Trust is built on a foundation of respect; a component of social respect is competence. Principals need to show that they believe in teacher competence and believe that educators operate with the best interest of students in mind. Yet trust can be undermined when incompetence is allowed to persist. As a result, the principal also needs to **address incompetence fairly and firmly**. Bryk and Schneider's study showed that trust within a school eroded quickly when the principal did not tackle personnel issues related to incompetence.

Principals demonstrated competence by **communicating a strong vision for the school and clearly defining expectations that are upheld for all faculty members**. These administrator skills allowed the school staff to accomplish common goals and maintain a cohesive professional community characterized by collective responsibility for student learning. This cohesive community is lubricated by respectful interaction and courtesy among administration and staff members.

Trust and respect is the on-ramp to building collaboration and collegiality. Trust is the "connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of students" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 45). This means principals need to spend time considering how interpersonal interactions build trust and respect among staff. The principal needs to monitor his or her actions and those of the staff to build and sustain trust.

FOCUS ON NSDC'S STANDARDS



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003).

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Learn more about NSDC's standards, www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm

TOOL 7.9 Culture shift doesn't occur overnight — or without conflict**leading edge /** RICK DuFOUR**Culture shift doesn't occur overnight — or without conflict**

Staff members of every school face an inevitable question each year: What happens in our school when, despite our best efforts in the classroom, a student does not learn?

In traditional schools, the answer is left to the discretion of the individual classroom teacher, who is free to respond in different ways. The support a student will (or will not) receive depends on his or her teacher's practices, rather than a collective effort and a coordinated response. In truth, most schools play a form of educational lottery with children.

In professional learning communities, however, schools create a systematic response — processes to monitor each student's learning and to ensure that a student who struggles is provided additional time and support for learning according to a schoolwide plan. Furthermore, the response is timely. Students are identified as soon as they experience difficulty, allowing the school to focus on intervention rather than remediation. The response is directive. Students are not invited to seek extra help; they are required to receive the additional assistance and devote the extra time necessary to master the learning.

This coordinated system of support for students never occurs by chance. It can only occur when school leaders work with staff to develop a plan of intervention, carefully monitor the implementation of that plan, and confront those who disregard it. Furthermore, an effective system of intervention is not merely an add-on to existing school structures and assumptions, but represents a natural outgrowth of strong school cultures dominated by certain unifying concepts.

Boones Mill Elementary School in Franklin County, Va.; Los Penasquitos Elementary School in Rancho Penasquitos, Calif.; Freeport Intermediate School in Freeport, Texas, and Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Ill., illustrate this systematic approach to responding when students do not learn (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004). The schools could not be more

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dissimilar in terms of size, geographic location, accessibility to resources, and the students and the communities they serve. Yet these schools share common themes.

One of the most evident commonalities is that the staff in each school is emphatic about and fixated on the fundamental purpose of the school — high levels of learning for all students. There is no ambiguity and no hedging about their goal. No one suggests that all kids will learn if they are conscientious, responsible, attentive, developmentally ready, fluent in English, and come from homes with concerned parents who take an interest in their education. There is no hint that staff members believe they can help all kids learn if class sizes are reduced, more resources are made available, new textbooks are purchased, or more support staff are hired. In these four schools, staff members embraced the premise that the very reason their schools exist is to help all their students — every one of the flawed, imperfect boys and girls who come to them each day — acquire essential knowledge and skills using the resources available to the school.

The collective commitment to high levels of learning for every student led these schools to assess the impact of their efforts and decisions based on tangible results. When teachers in a school are truly focused on student learning as their primary mission, they inevitably seek valid methods to assess the extent and depth of that learning. The teachers in these four schools all found that frequent common assessments, developed collaboratively and scored by every teacher of a grade level or course, were a vital resource in their efforts to monitor student learning. Doug Reeves (2004, p. 114-115) describes this process as “the gold standard in educational accountability” because these assessments are used to “improve teaching and learning, not merely to evaluate students and schools.”

The teachers in the four schools embrace data and information from their common assessments because the assessments provide timely and powerful insights into their students' learning. They do not denigrate data that suggest all is not well, nor do they blindly worship means, modes, and medians. They have a healthy respect for the results of their common assessments because those assessments help them monitor the effectiveness of their teaching and identify individual students who are experiencing difficulty. Once those students are identified, the schoolwide system



In each issue of *JSD*, Rick DuFour writes about effective leadership. His columns can be found at www.nsdc.org/library/authors/dufour.cfm

of intervention ensures that the students immediately receive additional time and support for learning.

HOW LEADERS CREATE A CULTURE COMMITTED TO LEARNING

A critical element in creating these powerful school cultures is the principal's leadership. Each is clearly committed to empowering staff, delegating authority, and developing collaborative decision-making processes, but none is unwilling to confront a staff member who violates the fundamental concepts of the school's culture. Leadership is widely distributed in each school, with clearly delineated guiding coalitions overseeing the improvement process. The collaborative team structures in place in each school also encourage fluid situational leadership throughout the school. When a team discovers that one of its members has special expertise in a particular content area, in teaching a concept, in developing effective assessments, or in meeting the needs of a particular kind of learner, that member naturally assumes temporary leadership based on that expertise when the team focuses on that topic. The principals delegate authority and serve as leaders of leaders rather than the central problem solver of the school.

Nevertheless, in the early stages of implementing the changes that helped the school become a professional learning community, each principal faced challenges from one or more staff members who either aggressively or passively resisted the school's new direction. The consistent way the principals dealt with staff challenges offers important insights into leading the professional learning community process. In every case, the principal met with the teacher privately, stated concerns very directly, and identified the specific steps the teacher needed to take to remedy the situation. Finally, the principal asked how he or she might help the teacher make the necessary changes.

The teachers did not always respond positively to these discussions. Some became quite emotional and defensive. The principals, however, did not hedge. They made it clear that the teacher's behavior was unacceptable and that the need for change was imperative. They did so without rancor, but they left no doubt about their expectations.

Perhaps there are schools that have made the transition to a professional learning community without conflict or anxiety, but I am unaware of any. Disagreements and tension are to be expected. The question schools must face is not, "How can we eliminate all potential for conflict as we

go through this process?," but rather, "How will we react when we are immersed in the conflict that accompanies significant change?" In *Crucial Conversations* (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2002), the authors contrast how teams respond when faced with conflict. Ineffective teams will ignore the problem, letting it fester and build until resentment and frustration lead to an explosion of accusations and recrimination. Good teams will take the matter to the boss and ask that he or she deal with the problem and find a satisfactory solution. Great teams will deal with the issue themselves, engaging in open dialogue and applying positive peer pressure to bring about the desired change.

The problem in schools is that teams almost never start out as great teams. Before they get to the point where team members can work together to resolve the matter, they likely will need the principal to help remedy the situation. A critical factor in creating the learning-centered culture of these four schools was the principal's willingness to confront obvious violations of the concepts upon which those cultures were built.

Culture has been defined as "the way we do things around here." Leaders shape the norms of behavior (and thus the culture) of their organizations in a number of ways. When principals work with staff to build processes to monitor each student's learning and to develop systems of intervention that give students additional time and support when they experience difficulty, they create the structures that support the concept of learning for all. When they give staff clear parameters to guide their work but considerable autonomy in implementation, they increase the likelihood that staff members will embrace that concept. But when principals are unwilling to tolerate actions that violate the underlying values of the culture, they use a powerful strategy for shaping the norms of behavior within their school.

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The principals
delegate
authority and
serve as leaders
of leaders rather
than the central
problem solver of
the school.

TOOL 7.10 Student learning grows in professional cultures**AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1998**

NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

<http://www.nsd.org>**INSIDE**

- 3** Doing a history of your school's culture
- 4** Strategies for strengthening culture
- 5** Developing cultural action plans
- 6** Evaluating your school's culture
- 7** Resources
- 8** Ask Dr. Developer

Tools For SchoolsTM

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improvement

Student learning grows in professional cultures

By Joan Richardson

An article in a professional publication describes how a variety of schools have used study groups to explore topics of interest to teachers. Two teachers reading the article react quite differently.

One says, "Great idea. The teachers in my school would love to try that. How would we get started?"

Another groans. "That might work in your school but it would never work in my school."

Each teacher has just identified an element of the culture in her school.

Culture is, simply, the way we do things around here. No teacher needs a handbook to know "what's right and what's rude" in the school in which she works. Students, teachers, and parents may not be able to define a school's culture, but they know what is important and what is expected in that school.

In their upcoming book, *Shaping Culture: The School Leader's Role*, Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson describe culture this way: "Culture is the underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have been built up over

time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges."

Every church, business, community, even every block in your neighborhood has its own culture. Schools are no different. A school's culture may support teachers who try to improve their teaching or it may ridicule anyone who tries to stand out from the crowd. It might encourage teachers to work on projects together or it might punish anyone who seeks such collegial support. The culture may encourage teachers to set high standards for students or it may send a message that "these kids can't be expected to do much better."

Why does culture matter? For that, Kent Peterson has a very simple answer. "In study after study, where culture did not support and encourage reform, it did not happen. It is almost impossible to overstate the importance of culture and its relationship to improved student learning. You have to have the structures, a curriculum, appropriate assessments – all of that. But if you don't have a strong and healthy school culture, none of the rest will matter," he said.

In their 1985 article, Jon Saphier and Matthew

Continued on Page 2

Students, teachers, and parents may not be able to define a school's culture, but they know what is important and what is expected in that school.

Culture

Tools For Schools

The 12 norms of a healthy school culture

- 1 Collegiality
- 2 Experimentation
- 3 High expectations
- 4 Trust and confidence
- 5 Tangible support
- 6 Reaching out to knowledge base
- 7 Appreciation and recognition
- 8 Caring, celebration, and humor
- 9 Involvement in decision making
- 10 Protection of what's important
- 11 Traditions
- 12 Honest, open communication

Source: "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures" by Jon Saphier and Matthew King (*Educational Leadership*, March 1985).

School's culture shapes student learning

Continued from Page One

King identified 12 norms which they said affected school improvement. (See column at left.)

"If certain norms of school culture are strong, improvements in instruction will be significant, continuous, and widespread; if these norms are weak, improvements will be, at best, infrequent, random, and slow," they said.

Peterson believes schools must begin by identifying the norms and beliefs in the school. He suggests answering these questions:

What are the rituals, traditions, and ceremonies in your school?

Who are the heroes in your school?

What stories do you tell about your school?

What symbols, slogans, and images represent your school?

How do you recognize student achievement?

How do you recognize staff growth?

Next, identify norms and beliefs that the staff wants to reinforce or change.

Again, Peterson poses a series of questions to help a staff:

Do the daily actions of teachers and principals support your underlying core values?

Do the history and stories that are told about your school support your core values?

What rituals and ceremonies would reinforce the key values in your school?

EXEMPLARY SCHOOL CULTURES

Each of this year's winners of the U.S. Department of Education Model Professional Development Awards can point to a time when the school's culture began to shift. (See the fall issue of the JSD to learn more about these winning schools and districts.) Like other USDOE winners, Ganado (Arizona) Intermediate School principal Susan Stropko said she focused on cultural issues before trying to address issues of student learning. "I went in knowing the culture had to be changed. They were not feeling very heard or cared

about. Nothing was going to change in that school until that changed," she said.

At Ganado, the process began by having grade level teams talk about their frustrations over lunch once a week, a step that Peterson endorses. "People need a chance to believe things can get better, they need a positive path, and they need hope," Peterson said.

"These conversations were basically about everything that was wrong. There was real unhappiness. They needed some time to vent," Stropko said.

Stropko joined in those conversations. "I did not go off on my own. I sat there and I listened. I was trying to establish my own credibility as a listener and as an administrator who would value what I heard and would work to get teachers what they said they needed."

These staff conversations continued until the Christmas break. "It was only after all of that that we could talk about the strengths and weaknesses of the school," she said.

"Their own changes were harder to talk about than the changes they wanted me to make. Once they laid out what they wanted to achieve, then we found out what we wanted to learn in order to do that," she said.

Peterson said a school needs to identify its own culture and say openly that not everyone will like working in this school. "If you've been going along for years with established structures and an established culture, it's very hard to re-examine what you're about. There is pain in giving up things that are fun and being able to complain without responsibility is part of the fun for some people," he said.

"There are people who don't want to improve their practice. They just don't want to be helped all the time," Peterson said.

Schools that gain the reputation as a "work hard, play hard" school soon will be less attractive to staffers who don't share that attitude and, eventually, he said, the new culture will perpetuate itself.

August/September 1998

Tools For Schools

Doing a history of your school's culture

COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR: This activity will help a school staff understand its present culture and how that culture evolved. It can be used with a school that is examining its culture for the first time or a school that needs to update its understanding of the culture.

TIME: Two hours.

SUPPLIES: Chart paper, markers, masking tape. Optional: yearbooks, copies of school newsletters or annual reports, newspaper clippings about the school, etc.

Directions

1. Ask each member of the group to identify the decade in which they began working at the school: 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, etc.
2. Divide the group according to the decades they identify. (Try to have at least three persons per decade. Put two decades together if necessary.)
3. Give each group at least one sheet of chart paper and ask members to identify the key elements of the decade. Suggest these questions for them to consider: Who were the school leaders – both formal and informal – during that decade? What were the crises and the challenges of the decade? What were the school's successes? What were the prevailing ideologies? What were the main curriculum features at that time? How was the school schedule organized? What clothing, music, and hairstyles were popular at the time?

Give each group 20 to 30 minutes to reminisce and jot down the key events.

4. Ask each group to post its decade's history on the wall. Arrange the decades in chronological order along the wall.
5. Ask the group to reflect aloud about the themes and patterns they see in these lists. Record these on a separate chart. Time: 60-90 minutes.

*U*nderstand the culture
of the school before

trying to change it.

—Michael Fullan and

Andy Hargreaves,

"What's Worth Fighting For?"

Working Together for

Your School"

August/September 1998

Tools For Schools

Strategies for strengthening culture

What is culture?
An informal

understanding of the way

we do things around

here, i.e. what keeps the

herd moving in roughly

the right direction.

— Terrence Deal

COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR: This process can be done as a follow-up to the activity on Page 3 or it can be done separately. This activity will help your staff determine its priorities and sharpen its focus on school culture this year.

TIME: 90 minutes.

SUPPLIES: Chart paper, markers, masking tape.

PREPARATION: Provide each staff member with a copy of the article, “Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures” by Jon Saphier and Matthew King (*Educational Leadership*, March 1985). The article identifies the 12 norms of a healthy school culture. Ask them to read it and reflect upon it before your scheduled meeting.

On the day of the meeting, post 12 sheets of chart paper around the room. Label each sheet of paper with one of the 12 norms.

Directions

1. Divide the faculty into 12 groups and assign one norm per group. (See Page 2 for the list of norms.) Ask them to share their ideas about this norm. Time: 5 minutes.
2. While still in the subgroup, have the members list as many suggestions as possible for strengthening that norm in the school. Time: 10 minutes.
3. Ask each group to explain the assigned norm to the entire faculty and provide an example of how it operates in the school today. Ask each group to limit its presentation to two minutes.
4. Then, ask the same group to post its suggestions for strengthening the norm in the school. Solicit suggestions from other group members. Post those as well. Time: 30 minutes.
5. When all norms have been explained and suggestions posted, distribute five stickers to each staff member. Using the stickers, ask staff members to vote for the norms they believe need the greatest attention during the upcoming school year.
6. Tally the number of “votes” given to each norm. Post the votes for staff members to see.
7. Type up the staff suggestions and share them with the school improvement team or other appropriate committee.
8. Set aside time at a school improvement team meeting to discuss each norm and select one or two suggestions for focused attention during the school year.

August/September 1998

Tools For Schools

Developing cultural action plans

COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR: This activity should be done by the staff group at your school that would consider cultural issues, such as a school improvement team, leadership team, or climate committee. At the conclusion of this activity, the group should have an action plan for every norm that your school has agreed to address this year.

TIME: 90 minutes.

SUPPLIES: Chart paper, markers, masking tape.

Directions

1. Before the meeting, use a sheet of chart paper to create one form for each norm your school has agreed to address this year. Post those sheets on the walls of the meeting room. Example:

NORM: _____

What steps will we take to improve?	
When?	
Who will do this?	
What results do we want?	

2. Provide the group with the suggestions resulting from the activity on Page 4. Time: 10 minutes.
3. Ask each group to discuss the suggestions and select the ideas that they believe will do the most to improve that norm in the school. Time: 30 minutes.
4. Fill out each action plan. Time: 30 minutes.
5. Share the completed action plans with the staff and with the school's parents' organization.
6. Implement and monitor progress on the plan throughout the year.

*The only thing
of real importance*

that leaders do is

create and manage

culture.

— Edgar Schein,

“Organizational Culture

and Leadership”

August/September 1998

Tools For Schools

Evaluating your school's culture

*Culture building
requires that school*

leaders give attention to

the informal, subtle, and

symbolic aspects of

school life which shape

the beliefs and actions

of each employee within

the system.

— William Cunningham

and Don Gresso

COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR: This activity will help a staff assess its impact on the school's culture. Although this tool is presented here as an end-of-the-year evaluation tool, it could be easily modified and used as a beginning-of-the-year evaluation.

TIME: Two hours.

SUPPLIES: Chart paper, markers, masking tape.

Directions

1. Using a sheet of chart paper, create one panel like the following for each of the 12 norms on Page 2.

<i>This is a strong and healthy norm at our school.</i>				
<u>COLLEGIALITY</u>				
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree

2. Post the 12 panels around the meeting room.
3. Give each staff member 12 stickers and ask them to identify their beliefs about each norm by placing the stickers in the appropriate location on the chart paper. Direct them to use only one sticker per norm.
4. When all the stickers have been placed, divide the group into 12 smaller groups (one for each norm) to discuss the results and present them to the entire staff.

If this activity is being done at the beginning of the year, ask the group to focus on answering this question: *What actions do we need to take to improve this norm in our school?*

If this activity is being done at the end of the year, ask the group to answer this question: *What evidence do we have to demonstrate the results we've achieved?*

5. Reassemble the larger group. Ask one representative from each of the 12 smaller groups to present their ideas. After the presentation, allow time for additional comments from others who were not in that group. Time: 60 minutes.
6. Suggestions from this activity should be shared with the school improvement team as they develop their action plans for the year.

August/September 1998

Learning about school culture

*Stimulate your thinking about your school's culture
by reading some of these books and articles*

- ❑ *Assessing School and Classroom Climate* by Judith Arter. A consumer guide that offers educators help in choosing the best instruments for assessing school culture. Order document #ED 295 301 from ERIC Document Reproduction Services, (800) 443-3742 or (703) 440-1400, fax (703) 440-1408. Price: \$16.84.
- ❑ "Building Professional Community in Schools," Sharon Kruse, Karen Seashore Louis, and Anthony Bryk, *Issues in Restructuring Schools*, Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, Issue No. 6, Spring 1994. Reviews critical elements of a healthy school culture.

A copy of the report is available online at www.wcer.wisc.edu/completed/cors/issues_in_restructuring_schools/ISSUES_NO_6_SPRING_1994.pdf
- ❑ *Educational Leadership and School Culture*, edited by Marshall Sashkin and Herbert Walberg. Berkley, Calif.: McCutchan Publishing, 1993. Examines the research on the nature of educational leadership and school culture and how they are related. Order by calling (800) 227-1540. Price: \$33.75.
- ❑ "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures," Jon Saphier and Matthew King, *Educational Leadership*, March 1985. Identifies the 12 norms of a healthy school culture. Check your local library for a copy.
- ❑ *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture*, by Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson. Washington, D.C.: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1990. Examines the crucial role that principals play in developing and maintaining healthy school cultures. Order document #ED 325914. from ERIC Document Reproduction Services, (800) 443-3742 or (703) 440-1400, fax (703) 440-1408. Price: \$25.95.
- ❑ *Shaping School Culture: The School Leader's Role* by Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998. Provides an in-depth look at the ways that real schools shape their culture. Includes many examples. Available November 1998. Order by calling (800) 274-4434 or fax (800) 569-0443. Price \$33.95.
- ❑ *Transforming School Culture: Stories, Symbols, Values & The Leader's Role* by Stephen Stolz and Stuart Smith, ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, University of Oregon, 1995. Synopsizes research while offering numerous examples of schools' experiences with culture changes. Order by calling (800) 438-8841 or fax (541) 346-2334. Price: \$16.50.

Visit the Library at the NSDC web site at www.nsd.org for more articles and references on this and other subjects of interest to staff developers.

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August/September 1998

Tools For Schools

Ask Dr. Developer



Dr. Developer has all the answers to questions that staff developers ask. (At least he thinks he does!)

Principals essential in shaping school culture

Q *I'm a principal but, sometimes, I feel as if the teachers are steering the ship at my school. What is my role in shaping the culture of the school?*

A Teachers must play a crucial role in helping a school fulfill the vision of what a school wants to be, but the principal is an essential part of any change. Principals set the tone for their school every day, every week, and every year – from activities as small as picking up gum wrappers on the school grounds and their promptness in returning telephone calls to issues as large as sharing decision making and pursuing their own professional development.

In their book, *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture*, (see Page 7 for details), Terrence Deal and Kent Peterson identify six major ways that principals shape the culture, both formally and informally:

- 1) Developing a sense of what the school should be and could be;
- 2) Recruiting and selecting staff whose values fit with the school's;

3) Resolving conflicts, disputes, and problems directly as a way of shaping values;

4) Communicating values and beliefs in daily routines and behaviors;

5) Identifying and articulating stories that communicate shared values; and

6) Nurturing the traditions, ceremonies, rituals, and symbols that communicate and reinforce the school culture.

Since leaders must be models of the changes they seek, take time to reflect about your own attitudes and actions. Do you have a personal vision of what the school should be? Have you communicated that vision to your staff? How have you done that? What stories and anecdotes about the school do you share with your staff, with others in the school district, with your friends, and with parents?

Network with other principals. Read the stories of other principals who have struggled to reshape their schools. Their stories will provide you with guidance — and perhaps inspire you to continue the hard work that you're doing.

Send your questions to Dr. Developer, 1128 Nottingham Road, Grosse Pointe Park, MI 48230.

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TOOL 7.11 Pull out negativity by its roots

a t i s s u e
C U L T U R E

Pull out negativity by its roots

*Those who grow healthy school cultures
must root out weeds of bad culture*

By RICK DUFOUR and BECKY BURNETTE

The question facing educational leaders is not “Will our school have a culture?” but “Will we make a conscious effort to shape our culture?” The culture of a school — the assumptions, habits, expectations, and beliefs of the school’s staff — exists as clearly as the school building itself.

But, while principals are routinely advised to “build” a strong culture, cultures cannot be built. Architects and engineers construct a building using a linear, sequential model. Phase one must be addressed before moving to phase two. The building process is both visible and time-bound. Eventually building ends, and maintenance begins. The building is relatively permanent, specifically constructed to resist external pressures such as weather. Finally, a building is not constructed by accident. Unless there is a decision to erect the structure and purposeful steps taken to carry out that decision, the building will not exist.

None of this is true with culture. Tending to culture is nonlinear and requires rapid responses to unanticipated problems as they arise. Cultural norms are typically invisible, implicit, and often unexamined, made up of scores of subtleties in the day-to-day workings of the school. Culture is ongoing. At no point can it be said that the culture is complete and permanent. In brief, school

culture is organic rather than static.

The more accurate metaphor for the process of shaping culture is not building a building but cultivating a garden. A garden is nonlinear, with some elements dying out as others are being born. A garden is influenced both by internal and external factors. Its most vital elements occur underground and are not readily visible. Most importantly, a garden is fragile and very high maintenance. Even the most flourishing garden will eventually become overgrown if it is not nurtured. Flowers left unattended eventually yield to weeds. The same can be said of school cultures. Unless educators carefully tend to their schools’ cultures by shaping the assumptions, expectations, habits, and beliefs that constitute the norm within them, toxic weeds will eventually dominate.

Those who hope to grow strong, healthy school cultures must remain vigilant in rooting out the weeds of bad culture, including unwillingness to accept responsibility, working in isolation, turf



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wars, and confusing activity with effectiveness.

WEED 1:

WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR STUDENT LEARNING.

Educators absolve themselves of responsibility for student learning in various ways. Do any of the following sound familiar?

“Learning is a function of (select one): innate ability, socioeconomic status, genetics, home environment. We can’t control the variables responsible for learning.”

“We can’t be expected to get better results until (choose one) society makes education a priority, class sizes are reduced, we get a new textbook, we have more access to technology.”

“It’s our job to teach, but it’s the student’s job to learn. We can’t get better results until they accept their responsibility.”

The premise that the causes of learning lie exclusively or predominantly outside the sphere of influence of educators diminishes our profession. More importantly, this outlook breeds the cynicism and pessimism that represent the mortal enemies of any school improvement initiative.

To improve self-efficacy, schools can:

● *Create cognitive dissonance.*

School leaders can help staff members question their assumptions by presenting evidence contradicting those assumptions. Volumes of research studies demonstrate that what happens in school makes a difference in student achievement. Leaders should share those findings and talk with staff about the studies.

Internal and external benchmarking also creates dissonance. At one high school, for example, data helped staff discover that student test scores had climbed in mathematics and writing, but remained flat in reading. Data also revealed that reading scores in other similar area schools were significantly higher and steadily improving. The principals presented this information to staff

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members to analyze and discuss, helping them rethink their assumptions about their students’ abilities.

● *Create small victories.*

A garden cannot be rushed. Certain elements in the growth cycle must be addressed, and the process requires patience. Leaders must demonstrate that patience and take the long view, but must also recognize the importance of identifying, achieving, and celebrating evidence of growth along the way. Effective leaders plan for short-term wins, they do not just hope for them (Kotter, 1996). They establish a goal of particular interest to the faculty, take the necessary steps to accomplish that goal, and announce its achievement with fanfare. As a result, wary staff members look more favorably on the initiative and momentum begins to build.

● *Celebrate success.*

An organization’s culture can be found in the stories it tells itself. For 17 years, a part of every faculty meeting at Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Ill., has been devoted to sharing success stories. Individual teachers are recognized for their students’ extraordinary accomplishments, teaching teams are recognized for reaching student achievement goals in their courses, and the entire faculty is recognized for evidence of steadily improving student performance on indicators the school tracks. The principal typically tells the stories, although sometimes teachers supply them. Often, the stories are presented in the voices of the students themselves. Each year, every senior completes a survey on the teacher who has made the greatest impact on his or her life. Excerpts from the responses are presented to the entire staff in an internal memorandum every six weeks. Stevenson

staff members are constantly reminded by the students themselves of a teacher’s ability to make a positive difference in students’ lives. It would be virtually impossible for Stevenson teachers to operate on the assumption that teachers cannot impact students’ achievement when they are constantly surrounded by such success stories.

WEED 2:

WE PREFER TO WORK BY OURSELVES.

Schools have traditionally allowed the weeds of professional isolation to run rampant. Teachers decide what to do based on their own knowledge of content, instruction, assessment, and classroom management. Isolation is alive and well due to lack of time, incompatible schedules, personal routines, and deeply rooted traditions. Yet teachers cannot thrive isolated from their colleagues and denied access to fresh ideas and insights.

A collaborative culture doesn’t result from the principal’s hope or invitation. A collaborative culture results from a systematic effort to engage staff in ongoing, daily, job-embedded professional growth in an environment designed to ensure collaboration.

Toward that end, schools can:

● *Cultivate effective teams.*

Schools plant the seeds of a collaborative culture when they develop the capacity of teachers to work together in teams. Every teacher should be assigned to a team that focuses on student learning. The team’s structure (course specific, grade level, interdepartmental, vertical, etc.) is less important than having all teachers on a team with student learning as the focus.

● *Provide time for collaboration.*

A school isn’t likely to have a collaborative culture unless the principal creates a master schedule with a consistent time each week for teams to work together during the school day. Principals should protect the collaborative time for teamwork just as teachers protect students’ instructional time.

● *Ask each team to develop operational protocols.*

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Teachers unaccustomed to working together benefit from establishing the norms or protocols that will guide the behaviors of team members. Team protocols should take the form of commitments members are prepared to make to one another in carrying out their work as a team. Examples might include: “We will be on time for all team meetings; we will come to meetings prepared with all necessary materials; we will be active listeners and fully engaged at all our meetings.”

Insist that each team establishes and pursues SMART goals, and provide each team with relevant feedback regarding its progress.

Teachers begin to function as a team when members of the group work interdependently to achieve a common goal. When principals insist that each team identifies a SMART goal (Strategic and specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, Time-bound), they increase the likelihood that individual teachers will begin to function as a team. When they also create systems to provide each team member with relevant information regarding the extent to which it is making progress toward its goals, they promote a focus on results.

● *Monitor and celebrate the work of teams.*

There is much wisdom in the management adage, “What gets monitored gets done.” Principals must do more than provide teachers with time to meet in their teams and hope teams use the time effectively. They must monitor the work of teams by insisting they produce specific documents and artifacts that demonstrate the collective efforts of the team. Examples might include written goals, common assessments, rubrics, analysis of student performance, specific strategies to improve current results, etc. Principals must then provide feedback, encourage, redirect, and publicly celebrate the collective efforts of teams.

Ridding the school culture of the weeds of isolation takes continuous effort from school leaders — but the resulting collaborative culture provides a fertile soil

Schools that embrace every educational fad sow frustration and discontent.

for significant gains in staff and student learning.

WEED 3:

WE MUST PROTECT OUR TERRITORY.

When the school’s culture emphasizes staking out your plot and protecting your turf, when it focuses on what divides rather than what unites constituencies, the weeds of territorialism will eventually overtake the school. The “us vs. them” mentality can take many forms. Teachers can view each other as competitors. Administrators and staff can approach each other as adversaries. Parents can be depicted as meddling nuisances.

To resist turf wars, schools can:

- *Find common ground.*

Any complex organization will include those with contrasting opinions and unique perspectives. Leaders of a learning community acknowledge differences, but concentrate on identifying a few “big ideas” for constituencies to rally around. They establish these big ideas by helping everyone understand best practices and presenting information that enables the staff and community to assess how the school measures up to those practices. Guiding principles won’t free a school from problems or disagreements. But commonly held big ideas can provide a lens through which to view the problems and can help people treat each other with a greater modicum of grace.

For example, a school’s teachers, administrators, and parents might agree to endorse these three big ideas:

1. Because the school’s primary purpose is to teach students, all proposals, policies, and programs should be evaluated on the degree to which they promote student learning.
2. Each student’s learning should be closely monitored, and steps should be

taken at school and at home to provide additional time and support for students who are struggling with the material.

3. Schools get better results when teachers work collaboratively with each other and partner with parents.

- *Ask for commitments.*

Even if people rally around common concepts they hope will shape the school’s culture, they tend to focus on the failure of other groups to act in accordance with those concepts. Principals can help groups shift their focus from the deficiencies of others to their own sphere of influence by asking each group’s members to spell out what they are prepared to do to bring the critical concepts to life. A faculty that identifies specific actions and behaviors it expects of its members is more likely to grow a healthy culture than a faculty that focuses on others’ failures.

WEED 4:

WE FOCUS ON ACTIVITY RATHER THAN RESULTS.

Just as gardeners must know when and how much fertilizer to apply to nourish, rather than burn out and destroy individual plants, leaders must carefully concentrate and focus interventions and initiatives to contribute to a strong culture. Too many rob a staff of energy, kill school improvement efforts, and lead to a culture that answers new calls for action with a “this-too-shall-pass” mentality. Schools that embrace every educational fad sow frustration and discontent. Michael Fullan calls these schools “Christmas tree schools.” Like Christmas tree ornaments, the changes in these schools are fragile, dangling precariously, unable to survive an ill wind. When schools focus on the quality and depth of their improvement efforts, and when they judge the impact of those efforts on results rather than the number of activities, changes will become organic — “of the tree” not “on the tree.”

To build a culture that focuses on results, schools can:

- *Say no!*

Effective school leaders are a buffer

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between staff and those well-intentioned souls (legislators, governors, reformers, central office, parents, etc.) who want to press their agendas on the schools. They recognize that the world's capacity to generate ideas to improve schools exceeds the staff's capacity to implement meaningful change. Thus, they work with staff to clarify a shared vision of the school they are trying to create. They identify a few initiatives that offer the greatest leverage for moving the school in that direction. Most importantly, they focus collective efforts and energies on those few initiatives and resist the temptation to pursue other worthwhile projects.

● *Develop targets and timelines.*

Schools have a cultural bias to focus on the means rather than ends, on activi-

Flourishing cultures require persistent cultivation and constant care.

ties rather than results. Leaders can help overcome this cultural predisposition by 1) establishing schoolwide SMART goals that identify how the school will assess its improvement initiatives and 2) asking each team of teachers to translate schoolwide goals into team goals. When schools focus on a few critical goals and establish benchmarks to monitor progress toward these goals, they are less susceptible to being overrun by random acts of innovation.

CONCLUSION

Every school has a culture, whether or not the principal is mindful of shaping it. Weedy cultures are low maintenance. Flourishing cultures require persistent cultivation and constant care.

Principals are well-positioned to cultivate their schools' cultures. Cultivating a professional learning culture takes ongoing, never-ending work.

Those who are able to sustain the effort will find that the fruits of their labors produce much more than a well-tended garden. The seeds they sow will make a difference in the lives of both students and staff.

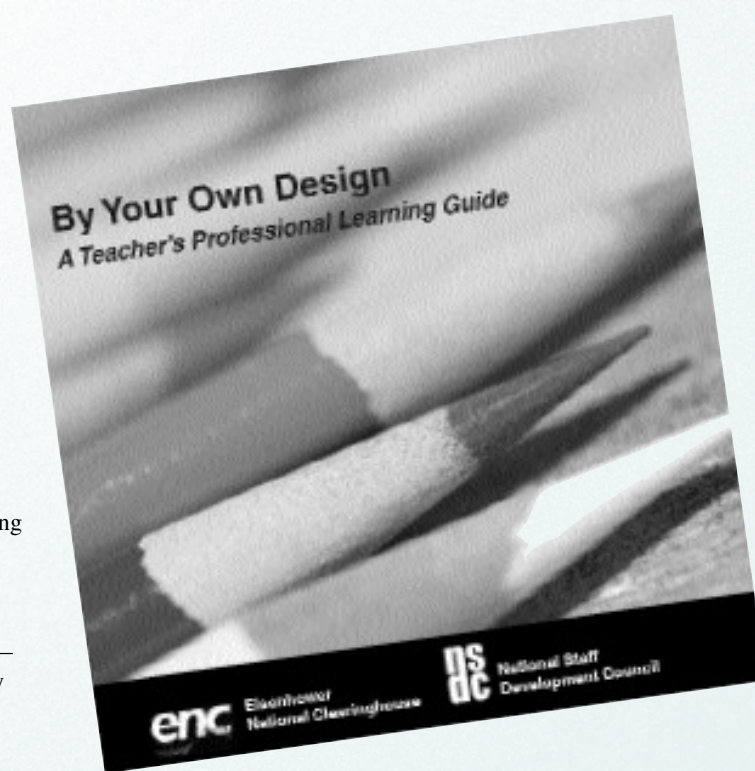
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By Your Own Design: A TEACHER'S PROFESSIONAL LEARNING GUIDE

The National Staff Development Council and the Eisenhower National Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education have created this collection of resources to assist teachers in creating, implementing, and evaluating professional learning plans.

Copies of the CD-ROM are available through the NSDC Online Bookstore, — www.nsdc.org/bookstore.htm — or by calling the NSDC business office at (800) 727-7288. Request item T1.



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TOOL 7.12 A new role: Cultural architect

A new role: Cultural architect

Some people might expect an article about the learning leader to focus on the skills and knowledge of a single individual, namely the principal. But, in the context of the NSDC Standards for Staff Development, a leader is someone who **promotes a school culture that supports ongoing team learning and improvement**. That means leadership *influences* educators to work toward a common goal of high levels of student learning by developing a school culture that expects and supports professional learning.

Historically, the individual has been the focus of school improvement (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). The thinking goes if we can only improve the content or instructional knowledge of the individual teacher, then the whole school will benefit. Yet, for the past few decades, many researchers have investigated and calculated the role of school's structural and cultural impact on individual effectiveness. This powerful work has revealed organizational norms, structures, and policies that lead to enhanced performance of educators as well as their students. There is a growing consensus that how educators act and interact with each other impacts student learning.

The principal, then, becomes a *cultural architect* who cultivates an organization that focuses on and encourages learning in service to students (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The learning principal **builds a plan, with the faculty, to support ongoing team learning and improvement**. The principal understands that learning teams are the infrastructure for faculty learning. The principal builds a clear set of expectations for learning teams, provides resources and

support, and enables teams to meet during the workday.

The learning principal **recognizes the value of team learning and improvement and discusses improvement activities in staff meetings**. While the learning team is fundamental to professional learning, the principal must also continue to bring the whole school together to focus on common goals. If this is not done, small groups can become estranged from each

other and competing for resources, recognition, and time (Kruse & Louis, 1997).

The learning principal **recognizes and rewards the accomplishments of teams and improvement efforts**. Our reward system needs to be amended so that team accomplishments receive praise, recognition, and reward.

Finally, the learning principal **conducts conversations, dialogues, and discussions within the school community until team learning and improvement become a shared goal**. A change of focus on team — rather than individuals — will not be accepted readily by all educators. The principal will have to hold countless conversations with staff on the purpose, structures, and outcomes of learning teams and their impact on student learning. Effective learning teams cannot be mandated; team meaning and purpose must become a strongly held faculty belief if they are to truly improve student learning. Beliefs are difficult to change. One way that beliefs change is through continued examination of underlying assumptions. Dialogue is a powerful strategy for these kinds of conversations about how the school staff will move together to improve student learning.

LEADERSHIP

Staff development that improves the learning of all students requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional improvement.

FOCUS ON THE NSDC STANDARDS



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003)

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More references for this column appear in the online version.

TOOL 7.13 The on-ramp to building learning communities

The on-ramp to building learning communities

Many of the districts I have worked with consider finding time for professional learning teams as the biggest challenge to creating professional learning communities. Developing these daily or weekly schedules takes a lot of political capital as well as professional influence to convince upper administration, school board members, and the community that teachers need time with their colleagues. More than one district has been surprised by the backlash, not from the community, but from faculty members. They do not see the value in working with colleagues and complain that the time is wasted in ineffective meetings and meaningless conversations. I am beginning to hear reports of districts losing their professional development schedules because teachers complained to school board members about how ineffectual the collegial meetings had become.

The central office *on-ramp* to building learning communities is to **prepare administrators and teachers to be skillful members of learning teams**. Central office staff cannot assume that once a new schedule is created that both teachers and their administrators will instinctively know how to act within those teams to improve instruction. Years of research about teaching have shown that discussing instruction, learning, and teaching with their colleagues is not a typical activity for teachers (Lortie, 1975).

In order to make learning teams effective, a number of strategies can be used. First, central office staff can **provide team leaders with ongoing experiences to learn about group process, group dynamics, the stages of group**

development, and using data in group decision making. Many groups will need a trained facilitator in order to do their best work. These facilitators will know that groups move through different stages in how well they work together and will understand how to focus on key issues appropriate to the current stage. For example, groups move into a normal stage of development called “storming.” At this stage, the group facilitator must understand and be able to help

group members work through conflict and controversy. Without a trained facilitator, groups can get stuck at this stage and their productivity declines.

Central office staff should also **schedule a skilled group facilitator to coach team leaders during learning team meetings**. Just as with learning other new skills, on-site coaching has proven to be a powerful strategy for implementation. This coaching

allows the new facilitator to receive feedback on their skills. The coach could help teams learn new skills or strategies for working together. For example, when groups are ready to examine student work, a skilled facilitator could teach them to use the Tuning Protocol (Easton, 2004).

Lastly, central office staff can build the system’s capacity to work effectively together by **developing a cadre of teachers and administrators who can work with learning teams within the schools and district**. One of the best ways to grow the district’s capacity to improve teaching and learning is to ensure that every district committee becomes a model of effective collaboration and collegiality.

If learning communities is the highway to high levels of student achievement, developing collaborative skills is one of the on-ramps.

Learning Communities

Staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district.

FOCUS ON THE NSDC STANDARDS



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Read more about the NSDC standards at www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm.

TOOL 7.14 Build the infrastructure first

Build the infrastructure first

I still hear many principals voice surprise when hearing that learning communities are not just one of the NSDC standards for staff development but the first one!

Isn't the goal of professional development to improve the skills and knowledge of individual teachers, they reason? What does the structure and inner workings of the school have to do with that goal, they ask?

I recently heard Robert Marzano describe factors that influence student achievement. Schools, he said, need to develop a professional culture of collegiality and professionalism that promotes teachers' conversation about their work. Next to a highly effective teacher, the second most powerful factor in increased student achievement is an effective school.

Further, a culture of expertise evolves, according to Marzano, when there is continuous and focused feedback on teaching. Yet, those types of conversations are rare in most of the schools where he works. According to work about school culture, talking about instruction is a conversation that is *close to the bone* for most teachers (Lortie, 1975). So, a principal must do more than merely create the space for such conversations among faculty; he or she must also build an infrastructure that will support these powerful professional conversations.

The principal first needs to **prepare teachers for skillful collaboration**. Collaboration is still not a commonplace behavior among most faculties. Many teachers continue to report that their interactions with other faculty remain relegated to the lounge, by the mail boxes, and near copying machines. Staff members need to

learn about collaboration as well as conflict resolution skills. While effective groups accomplish their goals, they also learn how to disagree with each other while maintaining working relationships.

Since most of this collegial work will occur in small groups, the principal **provides training and support to develop faculty members to be skilled facilitators who provide support during whole**

school and learning team

meetings. The knowledge and skills these facilitators develop include knowing about group process, group dynamics, the stages of group development and group decision making. Many times, adult groups need a trained facilitator who helps them do their best work and also teaches them how to work together effectively.

Secondly, the principal **ensures that the role of group facilitator becomes the responsibility of everyone and it rotates among members as the skill level of group members increases**. The principal increases the faculty's capacity to understand how to work as a group and develops shared leadership capacities within the faculty by asking everyone to serve as a group facilitator. This shared leadership strategy also builds collaborative relationships because no group member seems to have more power or influence as a result of being facilitator.

Building this infrastructure of collaborative skills is the first step in supporting teaching and learning. This background work creates a structure that supports professionalism and collaboration.

Learn more about the NSDC standards at www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm.

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